

WORKS  
OF  
PRESIDENT EDWARDS,  
IN EIGHT VOLUMES.

---

VOLUME III.

---

*CONTAINING*

- I. A NARRATIVE OF MANY SURPRISING CONVERSIONS.
- II. THOUGHTS ON THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION IN NEW ENGLAND.
- III. AN HUMBLE ATTEMPT TO PROMOTE EXPLICIT AGREEMENT IN PRAYER.
- IV. LIFE OF REV. D. BRAINERD AND REFLECTIONS' UPON IT.

---

*FIRST AMERICAN EDITION*

---

PUBLISHED AT WORCESTER,  
BY ISAIAH THOMAS, JUN.

---

*ISAAC STURTEVANT, PRINTER.*

---

1808.

THOUGHTS  
ON THE  
REVIVAL OF RELIGION  
IN  
NEW ENGLAND,  
1740.

---

PART IV.

*Showing what things are to be corrected or avoided, in promoting this WORK, or in our behaviour under it.*

Having thus observed, in some instances, wherein the conduct of those that have appeared to be the subjects of this work, or have been zealous to promote it, has been objected against or complained of without or beyond just cause; I proceed now

2nd Place, to show what things ought to be corrected or avoided.

Many, who are zealous for this glorious work of God, are heartily sick of the great noise there is in the country about *imprudences* and *disorders*; they have heard it so often from the mouths of opposers, that they are prejudiced against the sound. And they look upon it, that what is called being *prudent* and *regular*, so much insisted on, is no other than being asleep, or cold and dead, in religion; and that the great imprudence, so much blamed, is only being alive and engaged in the things of God. They are therefore rather confirmed in any practice, than brought off from it, by the clamour they hear against it, as imprudent and irregular. And, to tell the truth, the cry of irregularity and imprudence has been much more in the mouths of those who have been enemies to the main of the work than others; for they have watched for the halting of the zealous, and eagerly caught at any thing that has been wrong, and have greatly insisted on it, made the most of it, and magnified it; especially have they watched for errors in zealous preachers, who are much in reproving and condemning the wickedness of the times. They would therefore do well to consider that scripture, "The scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off, that make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of naught." They have not only too much insisted on the magnified real errors, but have very injuriously charged them as guilty in things wherein

they have been innocent, and have done their duty. This has so prejudiced the minds of some, that they have been ready to think that all that which has been said about errors and imprudences was injurious and from an ill spirit. It has confirmed them, that there is no such thing as any prevailing imprudences; and it has made them less cautious and suspicious of themselves, lest they should err.—Herein the devil has had an advantage put into his hands, and has taken it; and, doubtless, has been too subtle for some of the true friends of religion. That would be strange indeed, if in so great a commotion and revolution, and such a new state of things, wherein so many have been engaged, none have been guilty of any imprudence. It would be such a revival of religion as never was, if among so many men, not guided by infallible inspiration, there had not been many notable errors in judgement and conduct; our young preachers, and young converts, must in general vastly exceed *Luther*, the head of the reformation, who was guilty of a great many excesses in that great affair in which God made him the chief instrument.

If we look back into the history of the church of God in past ages, we may observe that it has been a common device of the devil, to upset a revival of religion; when he finds he can keep men quiet and secure no longer, then he drives them to excesses and extravagances. He holds them back as long as he can; but when he can do it no longer, then he will push them on, and, if possible, run them upon their heads. And it has been by this means chiefly that he has been successful, in several instances, to overthrow most hopeful and promising beginnings. Yea, the principal means by which the devil was successful, by degrees, to upset the grand religious revival of the world, in the primitive ages of Christianity, and in a manner to overthrow the Christian church through the earth, and to make way for the great Anti-Christian apostacy, that master-piece of all the devil's works, was to improve the indiscreet zeal of Christians, to drive them into those three extremes of *enthusiasm*, *superstition*, and *severity towards opposers*; which should be enough for an everlasting warning to the Christian church.

Though the devil will do his diligence to stir up the open enemies of religion, yet he knows what is for his interest so well, that, in a time of revival of religion, his main strength shall be tried with the friends of it; and he will chiefly exert himself in his attempts to mislead them. One truly zealous person, in the time of such an event, that seems to have a great hand in the affair, and draws the eyes of many upon him, may do more (through Satan's being too subtle for him) to hinder the work, than a hundred great, and strong, and open opposers.

In the time of the great work of Christ, his hands, with which he works, are often wounded in the house of his friends, and his work hindered chiefly by them: so that if any one inquires, as in Zech. xiii. 6. "What are those

wounds in thine hands?" He may answer, "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."

The errors of the friends of the work of God, and especially of the great promoters of it, give vast advantage to the enemies of such a work. Indeed there are many things which are no errors, but are only duties faithfully and thoroughly done, that wound the minds of such persons more than real errors: but yet one real error gives opposers as much advantage, and hinders and clogs the work as much, as ten that are only supposed ones. Real errors do not fret and gall the enemies of religion so much as those things that are strictly right; but they encourage them more, they give them liberty, and open a gap for them; so that some who before kept their enmity burning in their own breasts, and durst not show themselves, will on such an occasion take courage, and give themselves vent, and their rage will be like that of an enemy let loose. Those who lay still before, having nothing to say but what they would be ashamed of, (agreeable to Tit. ii. 8.) when they have such a weapon put into their hands, will fight with all violence. And indeed the enemies of religion would not know what to do for weapons to fight with, were it not for the errors of its friends; and so must soon fall before them. Besides, in real errors, things that are truly disagreeable to the rule of God's word, we cannot expect the divine protection, and that God will appear on our side, as if our errors were only supposed ones.

Since therefore the errors of the friends and promoters of such a glorious work of God are of such dreadful consequence; and seeing the devil, being sensible of this, is so assiduous, watchful, and subtle in his attempts with them, and has thereby been so successful to overthrow religion heretofore; certainly such persons ought to be exceeding circumspect and vigilant, diffident and jealous of themselves, and humbly dependent on the guidance of the good Shepherd. 1 Pet. iv. 7. "Be sober, and watch unto prayer." And 1 Pet. v. 8. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about." For persons to go on resolutely, in a kind of heat and vehemence, despising admonition and correction, being confident that they must be in the right because they are full of the Spirit, is directly contrary to the import of these words, be sober, be vigilant.

It is a mistake I have observed in some, by which they have been greatly exposed to their wounding, that they think they are in no danger of going astray, or being misled by the devil, because they are near to God; and so have no jealous eye upon themselves, and neglect vigilance and circumspection, as needless in their case. They say, they do not think that God will leave them to dishonour him, and wound religion as long as they keep near to him. And I believe so too, as long as they keep near to God, so as to maintain a universal and diligent watch, and care to do their duty, avoid sin and snares with diffidence in themselves, and humble dependence and prayerfulness.

But not merely because they are receiving blessed communications from God, in refreshing views of him; if at the same time they let down their watch, and are not jealous over their own hearts, by reason of its remaining blindness and corruption, and a subtle adversary.—It is a grand error for persons to think they are out of danger from the devil, and a corrupt, deceitful heart, even in their highest flights, and most raised frames of spiritual joy. For persons, in such a confidence, to cease to be jealous of themselves, and to neglect watchfulness and care, is a presumption by which I have known many woefully ensnared. However highly we may be favoured with divine discoveries and comforts, yet, as long as we are in the world, we are in the enemies country; and therefore that direction of Christ to his disciples is never out of date in this world, Luke xxi. 36. “Watch and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things, and to stand before the Son of man.”

It was not out of date with the disciples to whom it was given, after they came to be full of the Holy Ghost, and *out of their bellies flowed rivers of living water*, by that great effusion upon them that began on the day of *Pentecost*. And though God stands ready to protect his people, especially those that are near to him; yet he expects of all great care and labour, and that we should put on the whole armour of God, that we may stand in the evil day. To whatever spiritual privileges we are raised, we have no warrant to expect protection in any other way; for God has appointed this whole life, to be all as a race or a battle; the state of rest, wherein we shall be so out of danger as to have no need of watching and fighting, is reserved for another world. I have known it in abundance of instances, that the devil has come in very remarkably, even in the midst of the most excellent frames. It may seem a great mystery that it should be so; but it is no greater mystery, than that Christ should be taken captive by the devil, and carried into the wilderness, immediately after the heavens had been opened to him, and the Holy Ghost descended like a dove upon him, and when he heard that comfortable, joyful voice from the Father, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” In like manner Christ in the heart of a Christian, is oftentimes as it were taken, and carried captive into a wilderness, presently after heaven has been as it were opened to the soul, and the Holy Ghost has descended upon it like a dove, and when God has been sweetly owning the believer, and testifying his favour to him as his beloved child.

It is therefore a great error and sin in some persons, at this day, that they are fixed in some things which others account errors, and will not hearken to admonition and counsel, but are confident that they are in the right, because God is much with them. There were some such in the apostles’ days. The apostle *Paul*, writing to the *Corinthians*, was sensible that some of them would not be easily convinced that they had been in error, because they

looked upon themselves as spiritual, or full of the Spirit of God, 1 Cor. xiv. 37, 38. "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandment of the Lord; but if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant."

And although those who are spiritual amongst us have no infallible apostle to admonish them, yet let me entreat them, by the love of Christ, calmly and impartially to weigh what may be said to them by one who is their hearty and fervent friend, (though an inferior worm,) in giving his humble opinion concerning the errors that have been committed, by the zealous friends or promoters of this great work of God.

In speaking of past errors, and those we are in danger of, I would in the *First* place, take notice of the *causes* whence the errors that attend a great revival of religion usually arise; and, as I go along, take notice of some particular errors that arise from each of those causes.

*Secondly*, Observe some errors that have been owing to the influence of several of those causes conjunctly.

As to the first of these, the errors that attend a great revival of religion usually arise from these three things:

1. Undiscerned spiritual pride;
2. Wrong principles;
3. Ignorance of Satan's advantages and devices.

The first and the worst cause of errors that prevail in such a state of things is spiritual pride. This is the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advancement of religion. It is the chief inlet of smoke from the bottomless pit, to darken the mind and mislead the judgment. This is the main handle by which the devil has hold of religious persons, and the chief source of all the mischief that he introduces, to clog and hinder a work of God. —This cause of error is the main spring, or at least the main support, of all the rest. Till this disease is cured, medicines are in vain applied to heal other diseases. It is by this that the mind defends itself in other errors and guards itself against light, by which it might be corrected and reclaimed. The spiritually proud man is full of light already; he does not need instruction, and is ready to despise the offer of it. But, if this disease be healed, other things are easily rectified. The humble person is like a little child, he easily receives instruction; he is jealous over himself, sensible how liable he is to go astray, and therefore, if it be suggested to him that he does so, he is ready most narrowly and impartially to inquire. Nothing sets a person so much out of the devil's reach as humility, and so prepares the mind for true divine light without darkness, and so clears the eye to look on things as they truly are; Ps. xxv. 9. "The meek will he guide in judgment. And the meek will he teach his way." Therefore we should fight, neither with small

not with great, but with the king of Israel. Our first care should be to rectify the heart, and pull the beam out of our eye, and then we shall see clearly.

I know that a great many things at this day are very injuriously laid to the pride of those that are zealous in the cause of God. When any person appears, in any respect, remarkably distinguished in religion from others; if he professes those spiritual comforts and joys that are greater than ordinary, or appears distinguishingly zealous in religion; if he exerts himself more than others in the cause of religion, or seems to be distinguished with success; ten to one but it will immediately awaken the jealousy of those about him. They will suspect (whether they have cause or no) that he is very proud of his goodness, and affects to have it thought that nobody is so good as he; and all his talk is heard, and all his behaviour beheld, with this prejudice. Those who are themselves cold and dead, and especially such as never had any experience of the power of godliness on their own hearts, are ready to entertain such thoughts of the best Christians; which arises from a secret enmity against vital and fervent piety.

But then those that are zealous Christians should take heed lest this prove a snare to them, and the devil take advantage from it, to blind their eyes from beholding what there is indeed of this nature in their hearts, and make them think, because they are charged with pride wrongfully and from an ill spirit, in many things, that therefore it is so in every thing. Alas, how much pride have the best of us in our hearts! It is the worst part of the body of sin and death; the first sin that ever entered into the universe, and the last that is rooted out; it is God's most stubborn enemy!

The corruption of nature may all be resolved into two things, pride and worldly-mindedness, the devil and the beast, or self and the world. These are the two pillars of Dagon's temple, on which the whole house leans. But the former of these is every way the worst part of the corruption of nature; it is the first-born son of the devil, and his image in the heart of man chiefly consists in it. It is the last thing in a sinner that is overborne by conviction, in order to conversion; and here is the saint's hardest conflict; the last thing over which he directly militates against god, and is most contrary to the Spirit of the Lamb of God. It is most like the devil its father, in a serpentine deceitfulness and secrecy; it lies deepest, is most active, and is most ready secretly to mix itself with every thing.

And, of all kinds of pride, spiritual pride is upon many accounts the most hateful, it is most like the devil; most like the sin he committed in a heaven of light and glory, where he was exalted high in divine knowledge, honour, beauty, and happiness. Pride is much more difficult to be discerned than any other corruption, because its nature very much consists in a person's having too high a thought of himself. No wonder that he who has too high a thought of himself, does not know it; for he necessarily thinks that the opinion of

himself was without just grounds, he would therein cease to have it. Those that are spiritually proud, have a high conceit of these two things, *viz.* Their light, and their humility, both which are a strong prejudice against a discovery of their pride. Being proud of their light, that makes them not jealous of themselves; he who thinks a clear light shines around him, is not suspicious of an enemy lurking near him unseen; and then, being proud of their humility, that makes them least of all jealous of themselves in that particular, *viz.*, as being under the prevalence of pride. There are many sins of the heart that are very secret in their nature, and difficultly discerned. The psalmist says, Psal. xix. 12. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." But spiritual pride is the most secret of all sins. The heart is deceitful and unsearchable in nothing so much as in this matter; and there is no sin in the world, that men are so confident in. The very nature of it is to work self-confidence, and drive away jealousy of any evil of that kind. There is no sin so much like the devil as this for secrecy and subtlety, and appearing in a great many shapes undiscerned and unsuspected. It appears as an angel of light; takes occasion to arise from every thing; it perverts and abuses every thing, and even the exercises of real grace, and real humility, as an occasion to exert itself: it is a sin that has, as it were, many lives; if you kill it, it will live still; if you mortify and suppress it in one shape, it rises in another; if you think it is all gone, yet it is there still. There are a great many kinds of it, that lie in different forms and shapes, one under another, and encompass the heart like the coats of an onion; if you pull off one, there is another underneath. We had need therefore to have the greatest watch imaginable over our hearts with respect to this matter, and to cry most earnestly to the great searcher of hearts for his help. He that trusts his own heart is a fool.

God's own people should be the more jealous of themselves with respect to this particular at this day, because the temptations that many have to this sin are exceeding great. The great and distinguishing privileges to which God admits many of his saints, and the high honours he puts on some ministers, are great trials of persons in this respect. It is true, that great degrees of the spiritual presence of God tends greatly to mortify pride and corruption; but yet, though in the experience of such favours there be much to restrain pride one way, there is much to tempt and provoke it another; and we shall be in great danger thereby, without great watchfulness and prayerfulness. The angels that fell, while in heaven had great honours and high privileges, in beholding the face of God, and viewing his infinite glory, to cause in them exercises of humility, and to keep them from pride; yet, through want of watchfulness in them, their great honour and heavenly privilege proved to be to them an undoing temptation to pride, though they had no principle of pride in their hearts to expose them. Let no saint therefore, however eminent, and however near to God, think himself out of danger. He that thinks himself



most out of danger, is indeed most in danger. The apostle Paul, who doubtless was an eminent saint as any now, was not out of danger, even just after he was admitted to see God in the third heavens, 2 Cor. xii. And yet doubtless, what he saw in heaven of the ineffable glory of the Divine Being, had a direct tendency to make him appear exceeding little and vile in his own eyes.

Spiritual pride in its own nature is so secret, that it is not so well discerned by immediate intuition on the thing itself, as by the effects and fruits of it; some of which I would mention, together with the contrary fruits of pure Christian humility.

Spiritual pride disposes to speak of other persons' sins, their enmity against God and his people, the miserable delusion of hypocrites, and their enmity against vital piety, and the deadness of some saints, with bitterness, or with laughter and levity, and an air of contempt; whereas pure Christian humility rather disposes, either to be silent about them, or to speak of them with grief and pity.

Spiritual pride is very apt to suspect others; whereas an humble saint is most jealous of himself; he is so suspicious of nothing in the world as he is of his own heart. The spiritually proud person is apt to find fault with other saints, that they are low in grace; and to be much in observing how cold and dead they are; and being quick to discern and take notice of their deficiencies. But the eminently humble Christian has so much to do at home, and sees so much evil in his own heart, and is so concerned about it, that he is not apt to be very busy with other hearts; he complains most of himself, and complains of his own coldness and lowness in grace. He is apt to esteem others better than himself, and is ready to hope that there is nobody but what has more love and thankfulness to God than he, and cannot bear to think that others should bring forth no more fruit to God's honour than he. Some who have spiritual pride mixed with high discoveries and great transports of joy, disposing them in an earnest manner to talk to others, are apt, in such frames, to be calling upon other Christians about them, and sharply reproving them for their being so cold and lifeless. There are others, who in their raptures are overwhelmed with a sense of their own vileness; and, when they have extraordinary discoveries of God's glory, are all taken up about their own sinfulness; and though they also are disposed to speak much and very earnestly, yet it is very much in blaming themselves, and exhorting fellow-Christians, but in a charitable and humble manner. Pure Christian humility disposes a person to take notice of every thing that is good in others, and to make the best of it, and to diminish their failings; but to give his eye chiefly on those things that are bad in himself, and to take much notice of every thing that aggravates them.

In a contrariety to this, it has been the manner in some places, or at least the manner of some persons to speak of almost every thing that they see

amiss in others, in the most harsh, severe, and terrible language. It is frequent with them to say of others' opinions, or conduct, or advice—or of their coldness, their silence, their caution, their moderation, their prudence, &c.—that they are from the devil, of from hell; that such a thing is devilish, or hellish, or cursed, and that such persons are serving the devil, or the devil is in them, that they are soul-murderers, and the like; so that the words devil and hell are almost continually in their mouths. And such kind of language they will commonly use, not only towards wicked men, but towards them whom they themselves allow to be the true children of God, and also towards ministers of the gospel and others who are very much their superiors. And they look upon it as a virtue and high attainment thus to behave themselves. Oh, say they, we must be plain hearted and bold for Christ, we must declare war against sin wherever we see it, we must not mince the matter in the cause of God and when speaking for Christ. And to make any distinction in persons, or to speak the more tenderly, because that which is amiss is seen in a superior, they look upon as very mean for a follower of Christ when speaking in the cause of his Master.

What a strange device of the devil is here, to overthrow all Christian meekness and gentleness, and even all show and appearance of it, and to defile the mouths of the children of God, and to introduce the language of common sailors among the followers of Christ, under a cloak of high sanctity and zeal, and boldness for Christ! And it is a remarkable instance of the weakness of the human mind, and how much too cunning the devil is for us!

The grand defence of this way of talking is, That they say no more than what is true; they only speak the truth without mincing the matter; and that true Christians who have a great sight of the evil of sin, and acquaintance with their own hearts, know it to be true, and therefore will not be offended to hear such harsh expressions concerning them and their sins. It is only (say they) hypocrites, or cold and dead Christians, that are provoked and feel their enmity rise on such an occasion.

But it is a grand mistake to think that we may commonly use all such language as represents the worst of each other, according to strict truth. It is really true, that every kind of sin, and every degree of it, is devilish and from hell, and is cursed, hellish, and condemned or damned. And if persons had a full sight of their hearts, they would think no terms too bad for them; they would look like beasts, like serpents, and like devils to themselves; they would be at a loss for language to express what they see in themselves. But shall a child therefore, from time to time, use such language concerning an excellent and eminently holy father or mother, as, That the devil is in them; that they have such and such devilish, cursed dispositions; that they commit every day hundreds of hellish, damned acts; and that they are cursed dogs, hell-hounds, and devils? And shall the meanest of the people be justified, in

commonly using such language concerning the most excellent magistrates, or the most eminent ministers? I hope nobody has gone to this height. But the same pretences of boldness, plain-heartedness, and declared war against sin, will as well justify these things as the others. If we proceed in such a manner, on such principles as these, what a face will be introduced upon the church of Christ, the little beloved flock of that gentle Shepherd the Lamb of God! What a sound shall we bring into the house of God, into the family of his dear little children! How far off shall we soon banish that lovely appearance of humility, sweetness, gentleness, mutual honour, benevolence, complacency, and an esteem of others above themselves, which ought to clothe the children of God all over! Not but that Christians should watch over one another, and in any wise reprove one another, and do it plainly and faithfully; but it does not thence follow that dear brethren in the family of God, in rebuking one another, should use worse language than Michael the archangel durst use when rebuking the devil himself.

Christians, who are but fellow-worms, ought at least to treat one another with as much humility and gentleness as Christ, who is infinitely above them treats them. But how did Christ treat his disciples when they were so cold towards him, and so regardless of him, at the time when his soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death, and he in a dismal agony was crying and sweating blood for them, and they would not watch with him and allow him the comfort of their company one hour in his great distress, though he once and again desired it of them? One would think that then was a proper time, if ever, to have reproved them for a devilish, hellish, cursed, and damned slothfulness and deadness. But after what manner does Christ reprove them? Behold his astonishing gentleness! Says he, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. And how did he treat Peter when he was ashamed of his Master, while he was made a mocking stock and a spitting stock for him? Why, he looked upon him with a look of love, and melted his heart.

And though we read that Christ once turned, and said unto Peter, on a certain occasion, Get thee behind me, Satan; and this may seem like an instance of harshness and severity in reproofing Peter; yet I humbly conceive that this is by many taken wrong, and that this is indeed no instance of Christ's severity in his treatment of Peter, but on the contrary, of his wonderful gentleness and grace, distinguishing between Peter and the devil in him, not laying the blame of what Peter had then said, or imputing it to him, but to the devil that influenced him. Christ saw the devil then present, secretly influencing Peter to do the part of a tempter to his Master; and therefore Christ turned him about to Peter, in whom the devil then was, and spake to the devil, and rebuked him. Thus the grace of Christ does not behold

iniquity in his people, imputes not what is amiss in them to them, but to sin that dwells in them, and to Satan that influences them.

Spiritual pride often disposes persons to singularity in external appearance, to affect a singular way of speaking, to use a different sort of dialect from others, or to be singular in voice, countenance, or behaviour. But he that is an eminently humble Christian, though he will be firm to his duty, however singular—going in the way that leads to heaven alone, though all the world forsake him—yet he delights not in singularity for singularity's sake. He does not affect to set up himself to be viewed and observed as one distinguished, as desiring to be accounted better than others—despising their company, or conformity to them—but on the contrary is disposed to become all things to all men, to yield to others, and conform to them and please them, in every thing but sin. Spiritual pride commonly occasions a certain stiffness and inflexibility in persons, in their own judgment and their own ways; whereas the eminently humble person, though he be inflexible in his duty, and in these things wherein God's honour is concerned; and with regard to temptation to those things he apprehends to be sinful, though in never so small a degree, he is not at all of a yielding spirit, but is like a brazen wall; yet in other things he is of a pliable disposition, not disposed to set up his own opinion, or his own will; he is ready to pay deference to others' opinions, loves to comply with their inclinations, and has a heart that is tender and flexible, like a little child.

Spiritual pride disposes persons to affect separation, to stand at a distance from others, as being better than they; and loves the show and appearance of the distinction. But, on the contrary, the eminently humble Christian is ready to look upon himself as not worthy that others should be united to him—to think himself more brutish than any man, and worthy of the society of God's children.—And though he will not be a companion with one that is visibly Christ's enemy—but delights most in the company of lively Christians, choosing such for his companions, and will be most intimate with them, not delighting to spend much time in the company of those who seem to relish no conversation but about worldly things—yet he does not love the appearance of an open separation from visible Christians, as being a kind of distinct company from them who are on visible company of those who seem to relish no conversation but about worldly things—yet he does not love the appearance of an open separation from visible Christians, as being a kind of distinct company from them who are one visible company with him by Christ's appointment; and will as much as possible shun all appearances of a superiority, or distinguishing himself as better than others. His universal benevolence delights in the appearance of union with his fellow-creatures, and will maintain it as much as he possibly can without giving open countenance to iniquity, or wounding his own soul. And herein he follows the

example of his meek and lowly Redeemer, who did not keep up such a separation and distance as the Pharisees, but freely ate with publicans and sinners, that he might win them.

The eminently humble Christian is as it were clothed with lowliness, mildness, meekness, gentleness of spirit and behaviour, and with a soft, sweet, condescending, winning air and deportment; these things are just like garments to him, he is clothed all over with them. 1 Pet. v. 5. "And be clothed with humility." Col. iii. 12. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering."

Pure Christian humility has no such thing as roughness, or contempt, or fierceness, or bitterness in its nature; it makes a person like a little child, harmless and innocent, that none need to be afraid of, or like a lamb, destitute of all bitterness, wrath, anger, and clamour; agreeable to Eph. iv. 31.

With such a spirit as this ought especially zealous ministers of the gospel to be clothed, and those that God is pleased to employ as instruments in his hands of promoting his work. They ought indeed to be thorough in preaching the word of God, without mincing the matter at all; in handling the sword of the Spirit, as the ministers of the Lord of hosts, they ought not to be mild and gentle; they are not to be gentle and moderate in searching and awakening the conscience, but should be sons of thunder. The word of God, which is in itself sharper than any two-edged sword, ought not to be sheathed by its ministers, but so used that its sharp edges may have their full effect, even to the dividing asunder soul and spirit, joints and marrow. Yet they should do it without judging particular persons, leaving it to conscience and the Spirit of God to make the particular application. But all their conversation should savour of nothing but lowliness and good-will, love and pity to all mankind; so that such a spirit should be like a sweet odour diffused around them wherever they go. They should be like lions to guilty consciences, but like lambs to men's persons. This would have no tendency to prevent the awakening of men's consciences, but on the contrary would have a very great tendency to awaken them. It would make way for the sharp sword to enter; it would remove the obstacles, and make a naked breast for the arrow.—Yea, the amiable Christ-like conversation of such ministers in itself, would terrify the consciences of men, as well as their terrible preaching; both would co-operate to subdue the hard, and bring down the proud heart. If there had been constantly and universally observable such a behaviour as this in itinerant preachers, it would have terrified the consciences of sinners ten times as much as all the invectives and the censorious talk there has been concerning particular persons, for their opposition, hypocrisy, delusion, pharisaism, &c. These things in general have rather stupefied sinners' consciences; they take them up, and make use of them as a shield, wherewith to defend themselves from the sharp

arrows of the word that are shot by these preachers. The enemies of the present work have been glad of these things with all their hearts.—Many of the most bitter of them are probably such as in the beginning of this work had their consciences something galled and terrified with it; but these errors of awakening preachers are the things they chiefly make use of as plasters to heal the sore that was made in their consciences.

Spiritual pride takes great notice of opposition and injuries that are received, and is apt to be often speaking of them, and to be much in taking notice of their aggravations, either with an air of bitterness or contempt. Whereas pure and unmixed Christian humility, disposes a person rather to be like his blessed Lord, when reviled, dumb, not opening his mouth, but committing himself in silence to him that judgeth righteously. The eminently humble Christian, the more clamorous and furious the world is against him, the more silent and still will he be; unless it be in his closet, and there he will not be still.—Our blessed Lord Jesus seems never to have been so silent as when the world compassed him round, reproaching, buffeting, and spitting on him, with loud and virulent outcries, and horrid cruelties.

There has been a great deal too much talk of late, among many of the true and zealous friends of religion, about opposition and persecution. It becomes the followers of the Lamb of God, when the world is in an uproar about the, and full of clamour against them, not to raise another noise to answer it, but to be still and quiet. It is not beautiful, at such time, to have pulpits and conversation ring with the sound of persecution, persecution, or with abundant talk about Pharisees, carnal persecutors, and the seed of the serpent.

Meekness and quietness among God's people, when opposed and reviled, would be the surest way to have God remarkably to appear for their defence. It is particularly observed of *Moses*, on occasion of *Aaron* and *Miriam* envying him, and rising up in opposition against him, that he "was very meek, above all men upon the face of the earth," Num. xii. 3. Doubtless because he remarkably showed his meekness on that occasion, being wholly silent under the abuse. And how remarkable is the account the follows of God's being as it were suddenly roused to appear for his vindication! What high honour did he put upon Moses! And how severe were his rebukes of his opposers! The story is very remarkable, and worthy every one's observation. Nothing is so effectual to bring God down from heaven in the defence of his people, as their patience and meekness under sufferings. When Christ *girds his sword upon his thigh, with his glory and majesty, and in his majesty rides prosperously, his right hand teaching him terrible things, it is because of truth, and MEEKNESS, and righteousness.* Psal. xlv. 3, 4. *God will cause judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth shall fear and be still, and God will arise to judgment, to save all the MEEK of the earth.* Psal. lxxvi. 8, 9. *He will lift up the meek, and cast the wicked down to the ground.* Psal. cxlvii. 6. *He will*

*reprove with equity for the meek of the earth, and will smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips will he slay the wicked.* Isa. xi. 4. The great commendation that Christ gives the church of Philadelphia is, *Thou hast kept the word of my patience*, Rev. iii. 10. And we may see what reward he promises her, in the preceding verse, “Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship at thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.” And thus it is that we might expect to have Christ appear for us, if under all the reproaches we are loaded with, we behaved ourselves with a lamb-like meekness and gentleness. But if our spirits are raised, and we are vehement and noisy with our complaints under colour of Christian zeal, this will be to take upon us our own defence, and God will leave it with us, to vindicate our cause as well as we can; yea, if we go on in a way of bitterness, and high censuring, it will be the way to have him rebuke us, and put us to shame before our enemies.

Here some may be ready to say, “It is not in our own cause that we are thus vehement, but it is in the cause of God, and the apostle directed the primitive Christians to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.*” But how was it that the primitive Christians contended earnestly for the faith? They defended the truth with arguments and a holy conversation, but yet gave their reasons with meekness and fear. They contended earnestly for the faith, by fighting violently against their own unbelief, and the corruptions of their hearts: yea, they resisted unto blood striving against sin; but the blood that was shed in this earnest strife, was their own blood, and not the blood of their enemies. It was *in the cause of God* that Peter was so fierce, and drew his sword, and began to smite with it; but Christ bids him put up his sword again, telling him that they that take the sword shall perish by the sword; and, while Peter wounds, Christ heals. They contend the most violently, and are the greatest conquerors in a time of persecution, who bear it with the greatest meekness and patience.

Great humility improves even the reflections and reproaches of enemies, to put upon serious self-examination, whether or no there be not some just cause; whether or no there be not some just cause; whether they have not in some respect given occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully. Whereas spiritual pride improves such reflections to make them the more bold and confident, and to go the greater lengths in that for which they are found fault with. I desire it may be considered, whether there has been nothing amiss of late among the true friends of vital piety in this respect; and whether the words of David, when reviled by Michal, have not been misinterpreted and misapplied to justify them in it, when he said, “I will be yet more vile, and will be base in mine own sight.” The import of his words is, that he would humble himself yet more before God, being sensible that he was far from

being sufficiently abased; and he signifies this to Michal, that he longed to be yet lower, and had designed already to abase himself more in his behaviour.—Not that he would get the greater length, to show his regardlessness of her revilings; that would be to exalt himself, and not to abase himself as more vile in his own sight.

Another effect of spiritual pride is a certain unsuitable and self-confident boldness before God and men. Thus some, in their great rejoicings before God, have not paid a sufficient regard to that rule in Psal. ii. 11. They have not rejoiced with a reverential trembling, in a proper sense of the awful majesty of God, and the awful distance between him and them. And there has also been an improper boldness before men that has been encouraged and defended by a misapplication of that scripture. Prov. xxix. 25. “The fear of man bringeth a snare.” As though it became all persons, high and low, men, women, and children, in all religious conversation, wholly to divest themselves of all manner of shamefacedness, modesty, or reverence towards man; which is a great error, and quite contrary to Scripture. There is a fear of reverence that is due to some men, Rom. xiii. 7. “Fear to whom fear: Honor to whom honor.” And there is a fear of modesty and shamefacedness in inferiors towards superiors, that is amiable, and required by Christian rules, 1 Pet. iii. 2. “While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear;” and 1 Tim. ii. 9. “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety.” The apostle means that this virtue shall have place, not only in civil communication, but also in spiritual communication, and in our religious concerns and behaviour, as is evident by what follows, Ver. 11, 12. “Let the women learn in silence, with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” Not that I would hence infer that women’s mouths should be shut up from Christian conversation; but all that I mean from it at this time is, that modesty, or shamefacedness, and reverence towards men, ought to have some place, even in our religious communication one with another. The same is also evident by 1 Pet. iii. 15. “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” It is well if that very fear and shamefacedness, which the apostle recommends, have not sometimes been condemned, under the name of a *cursed fear of man*.

It is beautiful for persons, when they are at prayer as the mouth of others, to make God only their fear and their dread, and to be wholly forgetful of men present, who, let them be great or small, are nothing in the presence of the great God. And it is beautiful for a minister, when he speaks in the name of the Lord of hosts, to be bold, and to put off all fear of men. And it is beautiful in private Christians, though they are women and even children, to be bold in professing the faith of Christ, in the practice of all religion, and in



owning God's in the work of his power and grace, without any fear of men; though they should be reproached as fools and madmen, frowned upon by great men, and cast off by parents and all the world. But for private Christians, women and others, to instruct, rebuke, and exhort, with a like sort of boldness as becomes a minister when preaching, is not beautiful.

Some have been bold in things that have really been errors; and have gloried in their boldness in practising them, though odd and irregular. And those who have gone the greatest lengths in these things, have been by some most highly esteemed, as appearing bold for the Lord Jesus Christ, and fully on his side; while others who have professed to be godly, and who have condemned such things, have been spoken of as enemies of the cross of Christ, or at least very cold and dead; and thus many, that of themselves were not inclined to such practices, have by this means been driven on, being ashamed to be behind, and accounted poor soldiers for Christ.

Another effect of spiritual pride is to make the subject of it *assuming*. It oftentimes makes it natural to persons so to act and speak, as though in a special manner it belonged to them to be taken notice of and much regarded. It is very natural to a person that is much under the influence of spiritual pride, to take all the respect that is paid him. If others show a disposition to submit to him, and yield him the deference of a preceptor, he is open to it, and freely admits it; yea, it is natural for him to expect such treatment, and to take much notice if he fails of it, and to have an ill opinion of others that do not pay him that which he looks upon as his prerogative.—He is apt to think that it belongs to him to speak, and to clothe himself with a judicial and dogmatical air in conversation, and to take it upon him, as what belongs to him, to give forth his sentence, and to determine and decide. Whereas pure Christian humility *vaunteth not itself, doth not behave itself unseemly*, and is apt to *prefer others in honour*. One under the influence of spiritual pride is more apt to instruct others, than to inquire for himself, and naturally puts on the airs of a master. Whereas one that is full of pure humility, naturally has on the air of a disciple; his voice is, “What shall I do? What shall I do that I may live more to God's honour? What shall I do with this wicked heart?” He is ready to receive instruction from any body, agreeable to Jam. 1. 19. “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak.” The eminently humble Christian thinks he wants help from every body, whereas he that is spiritually proud thinks that every body wants his help. Christian humility, under a sense of others' misery, entreats and beseeches; but spiritual pride affects to command and warn with authority.

There ought to be the utmost watchfulness against all such appearances of spiritual pride, in all that profess to have been the subjects of this work, and especially in the promoters of it, but above all in itinerant preachers. The most eminent gifts, and highest tokens of God's favour and blessing, will not

excuse them.—Alas! What is man at his best estate! What is the most highly-favoured Christian, or the most eminent and successful minister, that he should now think he is sufficient for something, and somebody to be regarded; and that he should go forth, and act among his fellow-creatures as if he were wise, and strong, and good!

Ministers who have been the principal instruments of carrying on this glorious revival of religion, and whom God has made use of to bring up his people as it were out of Egypt, should take heed, that they do not provoke God, as Moses did, by assuming too much to themselves, and by their intemperate zeal to shut them out from seeing the good things that God is going to do for this church in this world. The fruits of Moses' unbelief, which provoked God to shut him out of Canaan, and not to suffer him to partake of those great things God was about to do for Israel, were chiefly these two things:

*First*, His mingling bitterness with his zeal. He had a great zeal for God, and he could not bear to see the intolerable stiffneckedness of the people, that they did not acknowledge the work of God, and were not convinced by all his wonders that they had seen. But human passion was mingled with his zeal, Psal. cvi. 32, 33. "They angered him also at the waters of strife; so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips." Hear now, ye rebels, says he, with bitterness of language.

*Secondly*, He behaved himself, and spake with an assuming air. He assumed too much to himself; *hear now, ye rebels, must WE fetch water out of this rock?* Spiritual pride wrought in Moses at that time. His temptations to it were very great; for he had had great discoveries of God, and had been privileged with intimate and sweet communion with him, and God had made him the instrument of great good to his church. But though he was so humble a person, and, by God's own testimony, meek above all men upon the face of the whole earth, yet his temptations were too strong for him. Which surely should make our young ministers that have of late been highly favoured, and have had great success, exceeding careful, and distrustful of themselves. Alas! How far are we from having the strength of holy, meek, aged Moses! The temptation at this day is exceeding great to both those errors that Moses was guilty of. There is great temptation to bitterness and corrupt passion with zeal; for there is so much unreasonable opposition made against this glorious work of God, and so much stiffneckedness manifested in multitudes of this generation, notwithstanding all the great and wonderful works in which God has passed before them, that it greatly tends to provoke the spirits of such as have the interest of this work at heart, so as to move them to speak unadvisedly with their lips. And there is also great temptation to an assuming behaviour in some persons. When a minister is greatly succeeded from time to

time, and so draws the eyes of the multitude upon him, when he sees himself followed, resorted to as an oracle—and people ready to adore him, and as it were to offer sacrifice to him, and as it were to offer sacrifice to him, as it was with Paul and Barnabas at Lystra—it is almost impossible for a man to avoid taking upon him the airs of a master, or some extraordinary person; a man had need to have a great stock of humility, and much divine assistance, to resist the temptation. But the greater our dangers are, the more ought to be our watchfulness, prayerfulness, and diffidence, lest we bring ourselves into mischief. Fishermen who have been very successful, having caught a great many fish, had need to be careful that they do not at length begin to burn incense to their net. And we should take warning by Gideon, who after God had highly favoured and exalted him, and made him the instrument of working a wonderful deliverance for his people, at length made a god of the spoils of his enemies, which became a snare to him and to his house, so as to prove the ruin of his family.

All young ministers, in this day of bringing up the ark of God, should take warning by the example of a young Levite in Israel, Uzzah the son of Abinadab. He seemed to have a real concern for the ark of God, and to be zealous and engaged in his mind on that joyful occasion of bringing it up. God made him an instrument to bring the ark out of its long-continued obscurity in Kiriath-jearim, and he was succeeded to bring it a considerable way towards mount Zion; but for his want of humility, reverence, and circumspection, and assuming or taking too much upon him, God broke forth upon him, and smote him for his error, so that he never lived to see and partake of the great joy of his church on occasion of the carrying up the ark into mount Zion, and the great blessings of heaven upon Israel consequent upon it. Ministers employed to carry on this work, have been chiefly of the younger sort, who have doubtless (as Uzzah had) a real concern for the ark; and it is evident that they are much animated and engaged in their minds (as he was) in this joyful day of bringing up the ark.—They are afraid what will become of the ark under the conduct of its ministers: they see it shakes, and they are afraid these blundering oxen will throw it. Some of them, it is to be feared, have been over-officious on this occasion, have assumed too much to themselves, and have been bold to put forth their hand to take hold of the ark, as though they were the only fit and worthy persons to defend it.

If young ministers had great humility, without a corrupt mixture, it would dispose them especially to treat aged ministers with respect and reverence, as their fathers, notwithstanding that a sovereign God may have given themselves greater assistance and success, 1 Pet. v. 5. “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder; yea, all of you be subject one to another; and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace

to the humble.” Lev. xix. 32. “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear they God; I am the Lord.”

As spiritual pride disposes persons to assume much to themselves, so it also disposes them to treat others with neglect. On the contrary, pure Christian humility disposes persons to honour all men, agreeable to that rule, 1 Pet. ii. 17.

There has been in some, who I believe are true friends of religion, too great appearance of this fruit of spiritual pride, in their treatment of those whom they looked upon to be carnal men; and particularly in refusing to enter into any discourse or reasoning with them. Indeed to spend a great deal of time in jangling and warm debates about religion, is not the way to propagate, but to hinder it; and some are so dreadfully set against this work, that it is a dismal task to dispute with them; all that one can say is utterly in vain. I have found it so by experience. To enter into disputes about religion, at some times, is quite unseasonable, particularly in meetings for religious conference, or exercises of worship. But yet we ought to be very careful that we do not refuse to discourse with men, with any appearance of a supercilious neglect, as though we counted them not worthy to be regarded; on the contrary, we should condescend to carnal men, as Christ has condescended to us, to bear with our unteachableness and stupidity.—He still follows us with instructions, line upon line, and precept upon precept, saying, Come, let us reason together; setting light before us, and using all manner of arguments with us, and waiting upon such dull scholars, as it were hoping that we should receive light. We should be ready with meekness and calmness, without hot disputing, to give our reasons, why we think this work is the work of God, to carnal men when they ask us, and not turn them by as not worthy to be talked with; as the apostle directed the primitive Christians to be ready to give a reason of the Christian faith and hope to the enemies of Christianity, 1 Pet. iii. 15. “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” And we ought not to condemn all reasoning about things of religion under the name of carnal reason. For my part, I desire no better than that those who oppose this work should fairly submit to have the cause betwixt us tried by strict reasoning.

One qualification that the Scripture speaks of once and again, as requisite in a minister, is, that he should be *διδασκτικον* apt to teach, 1 Tim. iii. 2. And the apostle seems to explain what he means by it, in 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25. Or at least there expresses one thing that he intends by it, *viz.* That a minister should be ready, meekly to condescend to and instruct opposers; *And the servant apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth.*

*Secondly*, Another thing from whence errors in conduct, that attend such a revival of religion, do arise, is *wrong principles*.

And one erroneous principle, that which scare any has proved more mischievous to the present glorious work of God, is a notion that it is God's manner in these days, to guide his saints, at least some that are more eminent, by inspiration, or immediate revelation. They suppose he makes known to them what shall come to pass hereafter, or what it is his will that they should do, by impressions made upon their minds, either with or without texts of Scripture; whereby something is made know to them, that is not taught in the Scripture. By such a notion the devil has a great door opened for him; and if once this opinion should come to be fully yielded to, and established in the church of God, Satan would have opportunity thereby to set up himself as the guide and oracle of God's people, and to have his word regarded as their infallible rule, and so to lead them where he would, and to introduce what he pleased, and soon to bring the Bible into neglect and contempt.—Late experience, in some instances, has shown that the tendency of this notion is to cause persons to esteem the Bible as in a great measure useless.

This error will defend and support errors. As long as a person has a notion that he is guided by immediate direction from heaven, it makes him incorrigible and impregnable in all his misconduct. For what signifies it, for poor blind worms of the dust, to go to argue with a man, and endeavour to convince him and correct him, that is guided by the immediate counsels and commands of the great Jehovah?

This great work of God has been exceedingly hindered by this error; and, till we have quite taken this handle out of the devil's hands, the work of God will never go on without great clogs and hindrances.—Satan will always have a vast advantage in his hands against it, and as he has improved it hitherto, so he will do still. And it is evident, that the devil knows the vast advantage he has by it; that makes him exceeding loath to let go his hold.

It is strange what a disposition there is in many well-disposed and religious persons to fall in with and hold fast this notion. It is enough to astonish one, that such multiplied, plain instances of the failing of such supposed revelations in the event, do not open every one's eyes. I have seen so many instances of the failing of such impressions that would almost furnish a history. I have been acquainted with them when made under all kinds of circumstances, and have seen them fail in the event, when made with such circumstances as have been fairest and brightest, and most promising. They have been made upon the minds of apparently eminent saints, and with an excellent heavenly frame of spirit yet continued, and made with texts of Scripture that seemed exceeding opposite, wonderfully brought to the mind, and the impressions repeated over and over; and yet all has most manifestly come to nothing, to the full conviction of the persons themselves. God has in

so many instances of late, in his providence, covered such things with darkness, that one would think it should be enough quite to blank the expectations of those who have been ready to think highly of such things. It seems to be a testimony of God, that he has no design of reviving revelations in his church, and a rebuke from him to the groundless expectations of it.

It seems to me that Zech. xiii. 5, is a prophecy concerning ministers of the gospel in the latter and glorious day of the Christian church, which is evidently spoken of in this and the foregoing chapters: The words are, *I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.* The words, I apprehend, are to be interpreted in a spiritual sense. *I am an husbandman:* The work of ministers is very often, in the New Testament, compared to the business of the husbandmen, that take care of God's husbandry, to whom he lets out his vineyard, and sends them forth to labour in his field, where one plants and another waters, one sows and another reaps; so ministers are called labourers in God's harvest. And as it is added, *Man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.* So the work of a minister is very often in Scripture represented by the business of a shepherd or pastor. And whereas it is said, *I am no prophet; but man taught me from my youth.* It is as much as to say, I do not pretend to have any thing added to them by impulses from above? Why should we not rest in that standing rule that God has given to his church, which, the apostle teaches us, is surer than a voice from heaven? And why should we desire to make the Scripture speak more to us than it does? Or why should any desire a higher kind of intercourse with heaven, than by having the Holy Spirit given in his sanctifying influences, infusing and exciting grace and holiness, love and joy, which is the highest kind of intercourse that the saints and angels in heaven have with God, and the chief excellency of the glorified man Christ Jesus?

Some that follow impulses and impressions indulge a notion, that they do no other than follow the guidance of God's word, because the impression is made with a text of Scripture that comes to their mind. But they take that text as it is impressed on their mind. But they take that text as it is impressed on their minds, and improve it as a new revelation to all intents and purposes; while the text, as it is in the Bible, implies no such thing, and they themselves do not suppose that any such revelation was contained in it before. Suppose, for instance, that text should come into a person's mind with strong impression, Acts ix. 6. "Arise, and go into the city; and it shall be told thee what thou must do;" and he should interpret it as an immediate signification of the will of God, that he should now forthwith go to such a neighbouring town, and there he should meet with a further discovery of his duty. If such things as these are revealed by the impression of these words, it is to all intents a new revelation, not the less because certain words of Scripture are made use of in the case. Here are propositions or truths entirely new, that those words

do not contain. These propositions, That it is God's mind and will that such a person by name should arise at such a time, and go to such a place, and that there he should meet with discoveries, are entirely new propositions, wholly different from those contained in that text of Scripture. They are no more implied in the words themselves, without a new revelation, than it is implied that he should arise and go to any other place, or that any other person should arise and go to that place. The propositions, supposed to be now revealed, are as really different from those contained in that scripture, as they are from the propositions contained in that text, Gen. v. 6. "And Seth lived an hundred and five years, and begat Enos."

This is quite a different thing from the Spirit's enlightening the mind to understand the words of God, and know what is contained and revealed in them, and what consequences may justly be drawn from them, and to see how they are applicable to our case and circumstances; which is done without any new revelation, only by enabling the mind to understand and apply a revelation already made.

Those texts of Scripture, that speak of the children of God as *led by the Spirit*, have been by some brought to defend such impulses; particularly Rom. viii. 14. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God:" And Gal. v. 18. "But if ye are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law." But these texts themselves confute them that bring them; for it is evident that the leading of the Spirit which the apostle speaks of is peculiar to the children of God, and that natural men cannot have; for he speaks of it as a sure evidence of their being the sons of God, and not under the law. But a leading or directing of a person by immediately revealing to him where he should go, or what shall hereafter come to pass, or what shall be the future consequence of his doing thus or thus, if there be any such thing in these days, is not of the nature of the gracious leading of the Spirit of God, peculiar to God's children. It is no more than a common gift; there is nothing in it but what natural men are capable of, and many of them have had in the days of inspiration. A man may have ten thousand such revelations and directions from the Spirit of God, and yet not have a jot of grace in his heart. It is no more than the gift of prophecy, which immediately reveals what will be, or should be hereafter; but this is only a common gift, as the apostle expressly shows, 1 Cor. xiii. 2, 8. If a person has any thing revealed to him from God, or is directed to any thing by a voice from heaven, or a whisper, or words immediately suggested to his mind, there is nothing of the nature of grace merely in this: it is of the nature of a common influence of the Spirit, and is but dross in comparison of the excellency of that gracious leading of the Spirit that the saints have. Such a way of being directed where one shall go, and what he shall do, is no more than what *Balaam* had from God, who from time to time revealed to him what he should do; so that he was in this sense

led by the Spirit for a considerable time. There is a *more excellent way* in which the Spirit leads *the sons of God*, that natural men cannot have; and that is, by inclining them to do the will of God, and go in the shining path of truth and Christian holiness, from a holy, heavenly disposition, which the Spirit of God gives them, and which inclines and leads them to those things that are excellent and agreeable to God's mind, whereby they *are transformed by the renewing of their minds, and prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God*, as in Rom. xii. 2. And so the Spirit of God does in a gracious manner teach the saints their duty; and he teaches them in a higher manner than ever *Balaam*, or *Saul*, or *Judas*, were taught. The Spirit of God enlightens them with respect to their duty, by making their eye single and pure, whereby the whole body is full of light. The sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God rectifies the taste of the soul, whereby it savours those things that are of God, and naturally relishes and delights in those things that are holy and agreeable to God's mind; and, like one of a distinguishing taste, it chooses those things that are good and wholesome, and rejects those that are evil. The sanctified ear tries words, and the sanctified heart tries actions, as the mouth tastes meat. And thus the Spirit of God leads and guides the meek in his way, agreeable to his promises; he enables them to understand the commands and counsels of his word, and rightly to apply them. Christ blames the *Pharisees* that they had not his holy distinguishing taste, to discern and distinguish what was right and wrong, Luke xii. 57. "Yea, and why even of your own selves judge ye not what is right?"

The leading of the Spirit which God gives his children, and which is peculiar to them, is that teaching them his statutes, and causing them to understand the way of his precepts, which the psalmist so very often prays for, especially in the 119th Psalm: and not in giving them *new statutes* and *new precepts*. He graciously gives them eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to understand; he causes them to understand the fear of the Lord, and so "brings the blind by a way they knew not, and leads them in paths that they had not known, and darkness light before them, and crooked things straight."

So the assistance of the Spirit in praying and preaching seems by some to have been greatly misunderstood, and they have sought after a miraculous assistance of inspiration, by the immediate suggesting of words to them, by such gifts and influences of the Spirit, in praying and teaching, as the apostle speaks of, 1 Cor. xiv. 14, 26. (which many natural men had in those days,) instead of a gracious holy assistance of the Spirit of God, which is the far more excellent way; (as 1 Cor. xii. 31. and xiii. 1.) the gracious and most excellent assistance of the Spirit of God in praying and preaching, is not by immediately suggesting words to the apprehension, which may be with a cold, dead heart; but by warming the heart, and filing it with a great sense of things to be spoken, and with holy affections, that these may suggest words.



Thus indeed the Spirit of God may be said, indirectly and mediately, to suggest words to us, to indite our petitions for us, and to teach the preacher what to say; he fills the heart, and that fills the mouth. We know that when men are greatly affected in any matter, and their hearts are very full, it fills them with matter for speech, and makes them eloquent upon that subject; and much more have spiritual affections this tendency, for many reasons that might be given. When a person is in a holy and lively frame in secret prayer, or in christian conversation, it will wonderfully supply him with matter, and with expressions, as every true Christian knows; and it has the like tendency to enable a person in public prayer and preaching. And, if he has these holy influences of the Spirit on his heart in a high degree, nothing in the world will have so great a tendency to make both the matter and manner of his public performances excellent and profitable. But, since there is no immediate suggesting of words from the Spirit of God to be expected or desired, they who neglect and despise study and premeditation, in order to a preparation for the pulpit, in such an expectation, are guilty of presumption: though doubtless it may be lawful for some persons, in some cases, (and they may be called to it,) to preach with very little study; and the Spirit of God, by the heavenly frame of heart that he gives them, may enable them to do it to excellent purpose.

Besides this most excellent way of the Spirit of God assisting ministers in public performances, which (considered as the preacher's privilege) far excels inspiration, there is a common assistance which natural men may have in these days, and which the godly may have intermingled with a gracious assistance, which is also very different from inspiration, and that is, his assisting natural principles; as the natural apprehension, reason, memory, conscience, and natural affection.

But, to return to the head of impressions and immediate revelations; many lay themselves open to a delusion by expecting direction from heaven in this way, and waiting for it. In such a case it is easy for persons to imagine that they have it. They are perhaps at a loss concerning something, undetermined what they shall do, or what course they shall take in some affair; and they pray to God to direct them, and make known to them his mind and will: and then, instead of expecting to be directed, by being assisted in considering the rules of God's word, his providence, and their circumstances, to look on things in a true light, and justly to weigh them, they are waiting for some secret immediate influence, unaccountably swaying their minds, and turning their thoughts or inclinations that way in which God would have them to go. Hereby they are exposed to two things,

*First*, They lay themselves open to the devil, and give him a fair opportunity to lead them where he pleases; for they stand ready to follow the first

extraordinary impulse that they shall have, groundlessly concluding it is from God.

And, *Ssecondly*, They are greatly exposed to be deceived by their own imaginations: for such an expectation awakens and quickens the imagination; and that oftentimes is called an uncommon impression, that is no such thing; and they ascribe that to the agency of some invisible being, which is owing only to themselves.

Again, another way, that many have been deceived, is by drawing false conclusions from true premises. Many true and eminent saints have been led into mistakes and snares, by arguing that they have prayed in faith. They have indeed been greatly assisted in prayer for such a particular mercy, and have had the true spirit of prayer in exercise in their asking it of God: but they have concluded more from these premises than is a just consequence from them. That they have thus prayed is a sure sign that their prayer is accepted and heard, and that God will give a gracious answer according to his own wisdom, and that the particular thing asked shall be given, or that which is equivalent; this is a just consequence from it.—But it is not inferred by any new revelation now made, but by the promises made to the prayer of faith in the Holy Scriptures. But that God will answer them in that individual thing they ask, if it be not a thing promised in God's word, or they do not certainly know that it is what will be most for the good of God's church, and the advancement of Christ's kingdom and glory, nor whether it will be best for them, is more than can be justly concluded from it. If God remarkably meets with one of his children while he is praying for a particular mercy of great importance, for himself or some other person, or any society of men, and does by the influences of his Spirit greatly humble him, and empty him of himself in his prayer, and manifest himself remarkably in his excellency, sovereignty, and all-sufficient power and grace in Jesus Christ—and in a remarkable manner enables the person to come to him for that mercy, poor in spirit, and with humble resignation to God, and with a great degree of faith in the divine sufficiency, and the sufficiency of Christ's mediation—that person has indeed a great deal the more reason to hope that God will grant that mercy, than otherwise he would have. The greater probability is justly inferred, agreeable to the promises of the Holy Scripture, in that such prayer is accepted and heard; and it is much more probable that a prayer that is heard will be returned with a particular mercy that is asked, than one that is not so. And there is no reason at all to doubt, but that God sometimes especially enable to the exercises of faith, when the minds of his saints are engaged in thoughts of, and prayer for, some particular blessing they greatly desire; *i.e.* God is pleased especially to give them a believing frame, a sense of his fulness, and a spirit of humble dependence on him, at such times. When they are thinking of and praying for such mercy, he gives them a particular sense

of his ability, and of the sufficiency of his power to overcome obstacles, and the sufficiency of his mercy and of the blood of Christ for the removal of the guilt that is in the way of the bestowment of such a mercy, in particular. When this is the case, it makes the probability still much greater, that God intends to bestow the particular mercy sought, in his own time, and his own way. But here is nothing of the nature of a revelation in the case, but only a drawing rational conclusions from the particular manner and circumstances of the ordinary gracious influences of God's Spirit. And as God is pleased sometimes to give his saints particular exercises of faith in his sufficiency, with regard to particular mercies; so he is sometimes pleased to make use of his word in order to it, and helps the actings of faith with respect to such a mercy. The strengthening of their faith in God's sufficiency, in this case, is therefore a just improvement of such scriptures; it is no more than what those scriptures, as they stand in the Bible, hold forth. But to take them as new whispers or revelations from heaven, is not making a just improvement of them. If persons have thus a spirit of prayer remarkably given to them, concerning particular mercy, from time to time, so as evidently to be assisted to act faith in God, in that particular, in a very distinguishing manner; the argument in some cases may be very strong, that God does design to grant that mercy, not from any revelation now made of it, but from such a kind and manner of the ordinary influence of his Spirit with respect to that thing.

But here a great deal of caution and circumspection must be used in drawing inferences of this nature. There are many ways by which persons may be misled and deluded. The ground on which some expect that they shall receive the thing they have asked for, is rather a strong imagination, than any true humble faith in the divine sufficiency. They have a strong persuasion that the thing asked shall be granted, (which they can give no reason for,) without any remarkable discovery of that glory and fulness of God and Christ, that is the ground of faith. And sometimes the confidence that their prayers shall be answered, is only a self-righteous confidence, and no true faith. They have a high conceit of themselves as eminent saints, and special favourites of God, and have also a high conceit of the prayers they have made, because they were much enlarged and affected in them; and hence they are positive in it, that the thing will come to pass. And sometimes, when once they have conceived such a notion, they grow stronger and stronger in it; and this they think is from an immediate divine hand upon their minds to strengthen their confidence; whereas it is only by their dwelling in their minds on their own excellency, and high experiences, and great assistances, whereby they look brighter and brighter in their own eyes. Hence it is found by observation and experience, that nothing in the world exposes so much to enthusiasm as spiritual pride and self-righteousness.

In order to drawing a just inference from the supposed assistance we have had in prayer for a particular mercy, and judging of the probability of the bestowment of that individual mercy, many things must be considered. We must consider the importance of the mercy sought, and the principle whence we so earnestly desire it; how far it is good, and agreeable to the mind and will of God; the degree of love to God that we exercised in our prayer; the degree of discovery that is made of the divine sufficiency, and the degree in which our assistance is manifestly distinguishing with respect to that mercy.—And there is nothing of greater importance in the argument than the degree of humility, poverty of spirit, self-emptiness, and resignation to the holy will of God, exercised in seeking that mercy. Praying for a particular mercy with much of these things, I have often seen blessed with a remarkable bestowment of the particular thing asked for.

From what has been said, we may see which way God may, only by the ordinary gracious influences of his Spirit, sometimes give his saints special reason to hope for the bestowment of a particular mercy they prayed for, and which we may suppose he oftentimes gives eminent saints, who have great degrees of humility, and much communion with God. And here, I humbly conceive, some eminent servants of Jesus Christ that we read of in ecclesiastical story, have been led into a mistake; and, through want of distinguishing such things as these from immediate revelations, have thought that God has favoured them, in some instances, with the same kind of divine influences that the apostles and prophets had of old.

Another erroneous principle that some have embraced, and which has been a source of many errors in their conduct, is, That persons ought always to do whatever the Spirit of God (though but indirectly) inclines them to. Indeed the Spirit of God is in itself infinitely perfect, and all his immediate actings, simply considered, are perfect, and there can be nothing wrong in them; and therefore all that the Spirit of God inclines us to directly and immediately, without the intervention of any other cause that shall pervert and misimprove what is from him, ought to be done. But there may be many things, disposition to do which may indirectly be from the Spirit of God, that we ought not to do. The disposition in general may be good, and from the Spirit of God; but the particular determination of that disposition, as to particular actions, objects, and circumstances, may be from the intervention or interposition of some infirmity, blindness, inadvertence, deceit, or corruption of ours. So that although the disposition in general ought to be allowed and promoted, and all those actings of it that are simply from God's Spirit, yet that particular ill direction or determination of that disposition, which is from some other cause, ought not to be followed.

As for instance, the Spirit of God may cause a person to have a dear love to another, and so a great desire of and delight in his comfort, ease, and

pleasure. This disposition in general is good, and ought to be followed; but yet through the intervention of indiscretion, or some other bad cause, it may be ill directed, and have a bad determination, as to particular acts; and the person indirectly, through that real love he has to his neighbour, may kill him with kindness; he may do that out of sincere goodwill to him, which may tend to ruin him.—A good disposition may, through some inadvertence or delusion, strongly incline a person to that which, if he saw all things as they are, would be most contrary to that disposition. The true loyalty of a general, and his zeal for the honour of his prince, may exceedingly animate him in war; but this good disposition, through indiscretion and mistake, may push him forward to those things that give the enemy great advantage, and may expose him and his army to ruin, and may tend to the ruin of his master's interest.

The apostle does evidently suppose that the Spirit of God, in his extraordinary, immediate, and miraculous influences on men's minds, may in some respect excite inclinations, which, if gratified, would tend to confusion, and therefore must sometimes be restrained, and in their exercise must be under the government of discretion, 1 Cor. xiv. 31-33. "For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." Here by *the spirits of the prophets*, according to the known phraseology of the apostle, is meant the Spirit of God acting in the prophets, according to those special gifts with which each one was endued: and here it is plainly implied that the Spirit of God, thus operating in them, may be an occasion of their having sometimes an inclination to do that, in the exercise of those gifts, which it was not proper, decent, or profitable that they should; and that therefore the inclination, though indirectly from the Spirit of God, should be restrained; and that it ought to be subject to the discretion of the prophets, as to the particular time and circumstances of its exercise.

I can make no doubt but that it is possible for a minister to have by the Spirit of God such a sense of the importance of eternal things, and of the misery of mankind—so many of whom are exposed to eternal destruction—together with such a love to souls, that he might find in himself a disposition to spend all his time, day and night, in warning, exhorting, and calling upon men; and so that he must be obliged as it were to do violence to himself ever to refrain, so as to give himself any opportunity to eat, drink, or sleep. And so I believe there may be a disposition, in like manner, indirectly excited in laypersons, through the intervention of their infirmity, to do what only belongs to ministers; yea, to do those things that would not become either ministers or people. Through the influence of the Spirit of God, together with want of discretion, and some remaining corruption, women and children

might feel themselves inclined to break forth aloud to great congregations, warning and exhorting the whole multitude; and to scream in the streets, or to leave their families, and go from house to house, earnestly exhorting others; but yet it would by no means follow that it was their duty to do these things, or that they would not have a tendency to do ten times as much hurt as good.

Another wrong principle, from whence have arisen errors in conduct, is, that whatsoever is found to be of present and immediate benefit, may and ought to be practised, without looking forward to future consequences. Some persons seem to think that it sufficiently justifies any thing they say or do, that it is found to be for present edification; it assists and promotes their present affection, and therefore they think they should not concern themselves about future consequences, but leave them with God. Indeed in things that are in themselves our duty, being required by moral rules, or absolute positive commands of God, they must be done, and future consequences must be left with God; our discretion takes no place here: but in other things we are to be governed by discretion, and must only look at the present good, but our view must be extensive, and we must look at the consequences of things. It is the duty of ministers especially to exercise this discretion. In things wherein they are not determined by an absolute rule, and not enjoined them by a wisdom superior to their own, Christ has left them to their own discretion, with that general rule, that they should exercise the utmost wisdom they can obtain, in pursuing that which, upon the best view of the consequences of things, will tend most to the advancement of his kingdom. This is implied in those words of Christ to his disciples, when he sent them forth to preach the gospel, Matt. x. 16. "Be ye wise as serpents." The Scripture always represents the work of a gospel-minister by those employments that especially require a wise foresight of, and provision for, future events and consequences. So it is compared with the business of a steward, which in an eminent manner requires forecast; as, for instance, a wise laying in of provision for the supply of the needs of a family, according to its future necessities. So it is compared to the husbandman, that almost wholly consists in things done with a view to the future fruits and consequences of his labour. The husbandman's discretion and forecast is eloquently set forth in Isa. xxviii. 24, 25, 26. "Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? Doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cumin, and cast in the principal wheat, and the appointed barley, and the rye in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him." So the work of the ministry is compared to that of a wise builder or architect, who has a comprehensive view; and for whom it is necessary, that, when he begins a building, he should have at once a view of the whole frame, and all the future parts of the structure,

even to the pinnacle, that all may be fitly framed together. So also it is compared to the business of a trader or merchant, who is to gain by trading; a business that exceedingly requires forecast, and without which is never like to be followed with success for any long time. So it is represented by the business of a fisherman, which depends on peculiar skill; and to that of a soldier, which perhaps, above any other secular business, requires great foresight, and a wise provision for future events and consequences.

And particularly, ministers ought not to be careless how much they discompose the minds of natural men, or how great an uproar they raise in the carnal world, and so lay blocks in the way of the propagation of religion. This certainly is not to follow the example of the zealous apostle *Paul*, who though he would not depart from his duty to please carnal men, yet, where he might with a good conscience, exceedingly laid out himself to please them. He avoided raising in the multitude prejudices, oppositions, and tumults against the gospel; and looked upon it as of great consequence. 1 Cor. x. 32, 33. "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, not to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." Yea, he declares that he laid himself out so much for this, that he made himself a kind of a servant to all sorts of men, conforming to their customs and various humours in every thing wherein he might, even in the things that were very burdensome to him, that he might not fright men away from Christianity, and cause them to stand as it were braced and armed against it, but on the contrary, if possible, might with condescension and friendship win and draw them to it; 1 Cor. ix. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23. And agreeable hereto are the directions he gives to others, both ministers and people: So he directs the christian *Romans*, *not to please themselves, but every one please his neighbour, for his good, to edification*, Rom. xv. 1, 2, *And to follow after the things that make for peace*, chap. xiv. 19. And he expresses it in terms exceeding strong, Rom. xii. 18. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." And he directs ministers to endeavour, if possible, to gain opposers by a meek, condescending treatment, avoiding all appearance of strife or fierceness, 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25, 26. To the like purpose, the same apostle directs Christians to *walk in wisdom towards them that are without*, Eph. iv. 5. And to avoid giving offence to others, if we can, *that our good may not be evil spoken of*, Rom. xiv. 16. So that it is evident, the most zealous and most successful propagator of vital religion that ever was, looked upon it to be of great consequence to endeavour, as much as possible, by all the methods of lawful meekness and gentleness, to avoid raising the prejudice and opposition of the world against religion.—When we have done our utmost, there will be opposition enough to vital religion, against which the carnal mind of man has such an enmity. We should not therefore needlessly increase and raise that

enmity. The apostle, though he took so much pains to please men, had persecution almost every where raised against him.

A fisherman is careful not needlessly to ruffle and disturb the water, lest he should drive the fish away from his net; but he will rather endeavour if possible to draw them into it. Such a fisherman was the apostle, 2 Cor. xii. 15, 16. "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. But be it so, I did not burden you, nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile."

The necessity of suffering persecution, in order to being a true Christian, has undoubtedly by some been carried to an extreme, and the doctrine has been abused. It has been looked upon as necessary to uphold a man's credit amongst others as a Christian, that he should be persecuted. I have heard it made an objection against the sincerity of particular persons, that they were no more hated and reproached. And the manner of glorying in persecution, or the cross of Christ, has in some been very wrong, bearing too much the appearance of lifting up themselves in it, that they were very much hated and reviled, more than most, as an evidence of their excelling others, in being good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Such an improvement of the doctrine of the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and of the necessity of persecution, becoming credible and customary, has a direct tendency to cause those that would be accounted true Christians, to behave themselves so towards those that are not well-affected to religion, as to provoke their hatred, or at least to be but little careful to avoid it, and not very studiously and earnestly to strive (after the apostle's example and precepts) to please them to their edification, and by meekness and gentleness to win them, and by all possible means to live peaceably with them.

I believe that saying of our Saviour, *I came not to send peace on earth, but division*, has been abused; as though when we see great strife arise about religion, violent heats of spirit against the truly pious, and a loud clamour and uproar against the work of God, it was to be rejoiced in, because it is that which Christ came to send. It has almost been laid down as a maxim by some, That the more division and strife, the better sign; which naturally leads persons to seek and provoke it, or leads them to such a manner of behaviour, such a roughness and sharpness, or such an affected neglect, as has a natural tendency to raise prejudice and opposition; instead of striving as the apostle did to his utmost, by all meekness, gentleness, and benevolence of behaviour, to prevent or assuage it.—Christ came to send a sword on earth, and to cause division, no otherwise than he came to send damnation; for Christ, that is set for the glorious restoration of some, is set for the fall of others, and to be a stone of stumbling and rock of offence to them, and an occasion of their vastly more aggravated and terrible ruin. And this is always the consequence of a great revival of vital religion; it is the means of the salvation of some,



and the more aggravated damnation of others. But certainly this is no just argument that men's exposedness to damnation is not to be lamented, or that we should not exert ourselves to our utmost, in all the methods that we can devise, that others might be saved, and to avoid all such behaviour towards them as tends to lead them down to hell.

I know there is naturally a great enmity in the heart of man against vital religion; and I believe there would have been a great deal of opposition against this glorious work of God in New England, if the subjects and promoters of it had behaved themselves never so agreeably to Christian rules; and I believe if this work goes on and spreads much in the world, so as to begin to shake kingdoms and nations, it will dreadfully stir up the rage of earth and hell, and will put the world into the greatest uproar that ever it was in since it stood. I believe Satan's dying struggles will be the most violent; but yet a great deal might be done to restrain this opposition, by a good conformity to that of the apostle, Jam. iii. 13. "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." And I also believe that if the rules of Christian charity, meekness, gentleness, and prudence had been duly observed by the generality of the zealous promoters of this work, it would have made three times the progress that it has; *i.e.* if it had pleased God in such a case to give a blessing to means in proportion as he has done.

Under this head of carelessness about future consequences, it may be proper to say something of introducing things new and strange, and that have a tendency by their novelty to shock and surprise people. Nothing can be more evident from the New Testament, than that such things ought to be done with great caution and moderation, to avoid the offence that may be thereby given, and the prejudices that might be raised, to clog and hinder the progress of religion. Yea, it ought to be thus in things that are in themselves good and excellent, and of great weight, provided they are not things of absolute duty, which though they may appear to be innovations, yet cannot be neglected without immorality or disobedience to the commands of God. What great caution and moderation did the apostles use in introducing things that were new, and abolishing things that were old, in their day! How gradually were the ceremonial performances of the law of *Moses* removed and abolished among the Christian *Jews*! and how long did even the apostle *Paul* himself conform to those ceremonies which he calls weak and beggarly elements! yea, even the rite of circumcision, (Acts xvi. 3.) that he might not prejudice the *Jews* against Christianity! So it seems to have been very gradually that the *Jewish* sabbath was abolished, and the christian sabbath introduced, for the same reason. And the apostles avoided teaching Christians in those earlier days, at least for a great while, some high and excellent divine truths, because they could not bear them yet, 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. Heb. v. 11, to the end.

Thus strictly did the apostles observe the rule that their blessed Master gave them, of not putting new wine into old bottles, lest they should burst the bottles, and lose the wine.

And how did Christ himself, while on earth, forbear so plainly to teach his disciples the great doctrines of Christianity, concerning his satisfaction, and the nature and manner of a sinner's justification and reconciliation with God, and the particular benefits of his death, resurrection, and ascension! because, in that infant state of the disciples, their minds were not prepared for such instructions; and therefore the more clear and full revelation of these things was reserved for the time when their minds should be further enlightened and strengthened by the outpouring of the Spirit after his ascension; John xvi. 12, 13. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." And Mark iv. 33. "And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to bear it."—These things might be enough to convince any one, that does not think himself wiser than Christ and his apostles, that great prudence and caution should be used in introducing things into the church of God, that are very uncommon, though in themselves excellent, lest by our rashness and imprudent haste we hinder religion much more than we help it.

Persons influenced by indiscreet zeal are always in too much haste; they are impatient of delays, and therefore are for jumping to the uppermost step first, before they have taken the preceding steps; whereby they expose themselves to fall and break their bones. They are delighted to see the building rise, and all their endeavour and strength is employed in advancing its height, without taking care proportionably of the bottom; whereby the whole is in danger of coming to the ground. Or they are for putting on the cupola and pinnacle before the lower parts of the building are done; which tends at once to put a stop to the building, and hinder its ever being a complete structure. Many that are thus imprudent and hasty with their zeal, have a real eager appetite for that which is good; but like children, are impatient to wait for the fruit, and therefore snatch it before it is ripe. Oftentimes in their haste they overshoot their mark, and frustrate their own end; they put that which they would obtain further out of reach than it was before, and establish and confirm that which they would remove. Things must have time to ripen. The prudent husbandman waits till the harvest is ripe, before he reaps. We are now just beginning to recover out of a dreadful disease; but to feed a man recovering from a fever with strong meat at once, is the ready way to kill him. The reformation from popery was much hindered by this hasty zeal. Many were for immediately rectifying all disorders by force, which was condemned by *Luther*, and was a great trouble to him. See *Sleiden's Hist. of the Reformation*, p. 52, &c. and book v. throughout. It is a vain prejudice that

some have lately imbibed against such rules of prudence and moderation; but they will be forced to come to them at last; they will find themselves unable to maintain their cause without them; and, if they will not hearken before, experience will convince them at last, when it will be too late for them to rectify their mistake.

Another error, arising from an erroneous principle, is a wrong notion that they have an attestation of Divine Providence to persons, or things. We go too far, when we look upon the success that God gives to some persons, in making them the instruments of doing much good, as a testimony of God's approbation of those persons and all the courses they take. It has been a main argument to defend the conduct of some ministers, who have been blamed as imprudent and irregular, that God has blessed them, and given them great success; and that however men charge them as guilty of wrong things, yet that God is with them, and then who can be against them? And probably some of those ministers themselves, by this very means, have had their ears stopt against all that has been said to convince them of their misconduct. But there are innumerable ways by which persons may be misled, in forming a judgment of the mind and will of God, from the events of providence. If a person's success be a reward of something in him that God approves, yet it is no argument that he approves of every thing in him. Who can tell how far the divine grace may go in greatly rewarding some small good in a person, a good meaning, something good in his disposition; while he at the same time, in sovereign mercy, hides his eyes from a great deal that is bad, which it is his pleasure to forgive, and not to mark against the person, though in itself it be very ill? God has not told us after what manner he will proceed in this matter, and we go upon most uncertain grounds when we undertake to determine. It is an exceeding difficult thing to know how far love or hatred are exercised towards persons or actions by all that is before us. God was pleased in his sovereignty to give such success to *Jacob* in that which, from beginning to end, was a deceitful, lying contrivance and proceeding of his. In that way he obtained a blessing that was worth infinitely more than the fatness of the earth and the dew from heaven, given to *Esau* in his blessing; yea, worth more than all that the world can afford. God was for a while with *Judas*, so that by God's power accompanying him, he wrought miracles and cast out devils; but this could not justly be interpreted as God's approbation of his person, or the thievery in which he lived at the same time.

The dispensations and events of providence, with their reasons, are too little understood by us, to be as our rule, instead of God's word; *God has his way in the sea, and his path in the mighty waters, and his footsteps are not known, and he gives us no account of any of his matters.* And therefore we cannot safely take the events of his providence as a revelation of his mind concerning a person's conduct and behaviour; we have no warrant so to do.

God has never appointed those things to be our rule. We have but one rule to go by, and that is his holy word; and when we join any thing else with it, as having the force of a rule, we are guilty of that which is strictly forbidden, Deut. iv. 2. Prov. xxx. 6. and Rev. xxii. 18. They who make what they imagine is pointed forth to them in providence, the rule of behaviour, do err, as well as those that follow impulses and impressions. We should put nothing in the room of the word of God. It is to be feared that some have been greatly confirmed and imboldened, by the great success that God has given them, in some things that have really been contrary to the rules of God's holy word. If so, they have been guilty of presumption, and abusing God's kindness to them, and the great honour he has put upon them. They have seen that God was with them, and made them victorious in their preaching; and this, it is to be feared, has been abused by some to a degree of self-confidence. This has much taken off all jealousy of themselves; they have been bold therefore to go great lengths, in a presumption that God was with them, and would defend them, and finally baffle all that found fault with them.

Indeed, there is a voice of God in his providence, that may be interpreted and well understood by the rule of his word; and providence may, to our dark minds and weak faith, confirm the word of God, as it fulfils it. But to *improve* divine providence thus, is quite a different thing from making a *rule* of providence. Good use may be made of the events of providence, of our own observation and experience, and human histories, and the opinion of eminent men; but finally all must be brought to *one rule*, viz. the word of God, and that must be regarded as our *only rule*.

Nor do I think that they go upon sure ground, who conclude they have not been in an error in their conduct, because at the time of their doing a thing for which they have been blamed and reproached by others, they were favoured with special comforts of God's Spirit. God's bestowing special mercies on a person, is no sign that he approves of every thing he sees in him at that time. *David* had the presence of God while he lived in polygamy; and *Solomon* had some very high favours, and peculiar smiles of Heaven, and particularly at the dedication of the temple, while he greatly multiplied wives to himself, and horses, and silver, and gold; all contrary to the most express command of God to the king, in the law of *Moses*, Deut. xvii. 16, 17. We cannot tell how far God may hide his eyes from beholding iniquity in *Jacob*, and seeing perverseness in *Israel*. We cannot tell what are the reasons of God's actions any further than he interprets for himself. God sometimes gave some of the primitive Christians the extraordinary influence of his Spirit when they were out of the way of their duty, and even while they were abusing it; as is plainly implied, 1 Cor. xiv. 31, 32, 33.

Yea, if a person has done a thing for which he is reproached, and that reproach be an occasion of his feeling sweet exercises of grace in his soul, I

do not think that a certain evidence that God approves of the thing he is blamed for: for undoubtedly a mistake may be the occasion of stirring up the exercise of grace. If a person, through mistake, thinks he has received some particular great mercy, that mistake may be the occasion of stirring up the sweet exercises of love, and true thankfulness to God. Suppose one that is full of love to God should hear what he deems credible tidings, concerning a remarkable deliverance of a child or a dear friend, or of some glorious thing done for the city of God, no wonder if, on such an occasion, the sweet actings of love to God, and delight in God, should be excited, though indeed afterwards it should prove a false report that he had heard. So, if one that loves God is much maligned and reproached for doing what he thinks God required and approves, no wonder that it is sweet to such an one to think that God is his friend, though men are his enemies; no wonder at all, that this is an occasion of his betaking himself to God as his sure friend, and find sweet complacency in him; though he be indeed in a mistake concerning that which he thought was agreeable to God's will.

As I have before shown that the exercise of a truly good affection may be the occasion of error, and may indirectly incline a person to do that which is wrong; so, on the other hand, error, or a doing that which is wrong, may be an occasion of the exercise of a truly good affection. The reason of it is this, that however all exercises of grace be from the Spirit of God, yet he dwells and acts in the hearts of the saints, in some measure, after the manner of a vital, natural principle, a principle of new nature in them; whose exercises are excited by means, in some measure, as other natural principles are. Though grace is not in the saints as a *mere natural principle*, but as a sovereign agent, and so its exercises are not *tied to means*, by an immutable law of nature, as in mere natural principles; yet God has so constituted, that grace should dwell so in the hearts of the saints, that its exercises should have some degree of connection with means, after the manner of a principle of nature.

Another erroneous principle that has been an occasion of some mischief and confusion, is, That external order in matters of religion, and use of the means of grace, is but little to be regarded. It has been spoken lightly of, under the names of ceremonies and dead forms, &c. and is probably the more despised by some, because their opposers insist so much upon it, and because they are so continually hearing from them the cry of *disorder and confusion*.—It is objected against the importance of external order, that God does not look at the outward form, he looks at the heart. But that is a weak argument against its importance, that true godliness does not consist in it; for it may be equally made use of against all the outward means of grace whatsoever. True godliness does not consist in ink and paper, but yet that would be a foolish objection against the importance of ink and paper in religion, when without it we could not have the word of God. If any external means at all

are needful, any outward actions of a public nature, or wherein God's people are jointly concerned in public nature, or wherein God's people are jointly concerned in public society, without doubt external order is needful. The management of an external affair that is public, or wherein a multitude is concerned, without order, is in every thing found impossible.—Without order there can be no general direction of a multitude to any particular designed end, their purposes will cross and hinder one another. A multitude cannot act in union one with another without order; confusion separates and divides them, so that there can be no concert or agreement. If a multitude would help one another in any affair, they must unite themselves one to another in a regular subordination of members, in some measure as it is in the natural body; by this means they will be in some capacity to act with united strength. And thus Christ has appointed that it should be in the visible church, as 1 Cor. xii. 14, &c. and Rom. xii. 4-8. Zeal without order will do but little, or at least it will be effectual but a little while. Let a company, however zealous against the enemy, go forth to war without any order, every one rushing forward as his zeal shall drive him, all in confusion; if they gain something at first onset, by surprising the enemy, yet how soon do they come to nothing, and fall an easy helpless prey to their adversaries! Order is one of the most necessary of all external means of the spiritual good of God's church; and therefore it is requisite even in heaven itself, where there is the least need of any external means of grace. Order is maintained amongst the glorious angels there. And the necessity of it for carrying on any design, wherein a multitude are concerned, is so great that even the devils in hell are driven to something of it, that they may carry on the designs of their kingdom. And it is very observable, that those irrational creatures for whom it is needful that they should act in union, and join as a multitude together to carry on any work for their preservation—by a wonderful instinct that God has put into them—observe and maintain a most regular and exact order among themselves; such as bees and some others. And order in the visible church is not only necessary for carrying on the designs of Christ's glory and the church's prosperity, but it is absolutely necessary to its defence; without it, it is like a city without walls, and can be in no capacity to defend itself from any kind of mischief. And so, however it be an external thing, yet is not to be despised on that account; for though it be not the food of souls, yet it is in some respect their defence. The people of Holland would be very foolish to despise the dikes that keep out the sea from overwhelming them, under the names of dead stones and vile earth, because the matter of which they are built is not good to eat.

It seems to be partly on this foundation that some have seemed to act on that principle, That the power of judging and openly censuring others should not be reserved in the hands of particular persons, or consistories appointed

thereto, but ought to be left at large, for any body that pleases to take it upon them, or that think themselves fit for it. But more of this afterwards.

On this foundation also, an orderly attending on the stated worship of God in families, has been made too light of; and it has been in some places too much a common and customary thing to be absent from family-worship, and to be abroad late in the night at religious meetings, or to attend religious conversation. Not but that this may be done on certain extraordinary occasions; I have seen the case to be such in many instances, that I have thought did afford sufficient warrant for persons to be absent from family-prayer, and to be from home till very late in the night. But we should take heed that it does not become a custom or common practice; if so, we shall soon find the consequences to be very ill.

It seems to be on the same foundation, of the supposed unprofitableness of external order, that it has been thought by some, there is no need of religious services and performances being limited to any certain office in the church; (of which more afterwards) and also, that those officers themselves, particularly that of the gospel-ministry, need not be limited, as it used to be, to persons of a liberal education; but some of late have been for having others, whom they have supposed to be persons of eminent experience, publicly licensed to preach, yea and ordained to the work of the ministry; and some ministers have seemed to favour such a thing. But how little do they seem to look forward, and consider the unavoidable consequences of opening such a door! If once it should become a custom, or a thing generally approved and allowed of, to admit uneducated persons to the work of the ministry, because of their remarkable experiences, and good understanding, how many lay-persons would soon appear as candidates for the work of the ministry; I doubt not but that I have been acquainted with scores that would have desired it. And how shall we know where to stop? If one is admitted because his experiences are remarkable, another will think his experiences also remarkable; and we perhaps shall not be able to deny but that they are nearly as great. If one is admitted because, besides experiences, he has good natural abilities, another by himself, and many of his neighbours, may be thought equal to him. It will be found of absolute necessity that there should be some certain, visible limits fixed, to avoid bringing odium upon ourselves, and breeding uneasiness and strife amongst others; and I know of none better, and indeed no other that can well be fixed, than what the prophet *Zechariah* fixes, *viz.* That those only should be appointed to be pastors or shepherds in God's church, that *have been taught to keep cattle from their youth*, or that have had an education for that purpose. Those ministers who would break over these limits, and make a practice of it, would break down that fence which they themselves, after they have been wearied with the ill consequences, would be glad to have somebody else build up for them. Not but that there

may probably be some persons in the land, who have had no education at college, that are in themselves better qualified for the work of the ministry, than some others who have taken their degrees, and are now ordained. But yet I believe the breaking over those bounds which have hitherto been set, in ordaining such persons, would in its consequences be a greater calamity than the missing such persons in the work of the ministry. The opening a door for the admission of unlearned men to the work of the ministry, though they should be persons of extraordinary experience, would on some accounts be especially prejudicial at such a day as this; because such persons, for want of extensive knowledge, are oftentimes forward to lead others into those things which a people are in danger of at such a time, above all others; *viz.* impulses, vain imaginations, superstition, indiscreet zeal, and such like extremes, instead of defending them from them, for which a people especially need a shepherd, at such an extraordinary season.

Another erroneous principle that some have been, at least, in danger of, is, that ministers, because they speak as Christ's ambassadors, may assume the same style, and speak as with the same authority, that the prophets of old did, yea that Jesus Christ himself did in the 23d of Matthew, *Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, &c.*; and that not only when they are speaking to the people, but also to their brethren in the ministry. The principle is absurd, because it makes no difference in the degrees and orders of messengers, though God has made a very great difference; for though they all come in some respect in the name of God, and with something of his authority, yet certainly there is a vast difference in the *degree* of authority with which God has invested them. Jesus Christ was sent into the world as God's messenger, and so was one of his apostles; and so also is an ordinary pastor of a church: but yet it does not follow, that because Jesus Christ and an ordinary minister are both messengers of God, that therefore an ordinary minister, in his office, is vested with an equal degree of authority that Christ was in his. As there is a great difference in their authority, and as Christ came as God's messenger in a vastly higher manner, so another style became him, more authoritative than is proper for us worms of the dust, though we also are messengers of inferior degree. It would be strange if God, when he has made so great a difference in the degree in which he has invested different messengers with his authority, should make no difference as to the outward appearance and show of authority. Though God has put great honour upon ministers, and they may speak as his ambassadors, yet he never intended that they should have the same outward appearance of authority and majesty, either in their behaviour or speech, as his Son shall have, when he comes to judgement at the last day; though both come in the name of the Lord. Alas! can it enter into the hearts of worms of the dust, that it is fit and suitable it should be so?



Thus I have considered the two first of those three causes of error in conduct that were mentioned: I come now to the

*Third* and last cause of errors of those that have appeared to be the subjects or zealous promoters of this work viz, a being ignorant or unobservant of some particular things, by which the devil has special advantage.

And here I would particularly notice:

1. Of some things with respect to the inward experiences of Christians themselves. And,

2. Something with regard to the external effects of experiences.

There are three things I would notice with regard to the experiences of Christians, by which the devil has many advantages against us.

I. The first thing is the *mixture* there oftentimes is in the experiences of true Christians; whereby when they have truly gracious experiences, and divine and spiritual discoveries and exercises, they have something else mixed with them, besides what is spiritual. There is a mixture of that which is natural, and that which is corrupt, with that which is divine. The great imperfection of grace, the feebleness and infancy of the new nature, and the great remains of corruption, together with our circumstances in this world, where we are encompassed with what tends to pollute us, expose to this. And indeed it is not to be supposed that Christians ever have any experiences in this world that are wholly pure, entirely spiritual, without any mixture of what is natural and carnal. The beam of light, as it comes from the fountain of light upon our hearts, is pure; but, as it is reflected thence, it is mixt. The seed as sent from heaven, and planted in the heart, is pure; but, as it springs up out of the heart, is impure: yea, there is commonly a much greater mixture than persons for the most part seem to imagine. I have often thought that the experiences of true Christians are very frequently as it is with some sorts of fruits, which are enveloped in several coverings of thick shells or pods, that are thrown away by him that gathers the fruit, and but a very small part of the whole bulk is the pure kernel that is good to eat.

The things, of all which there is frequently some mixture with gracious experiences, yea with very great and high experiences, are these three; *human or natural affection and passions; impressions on the imagination; and a degree of self-righteousness or spiritual pride*. There is very often with that which is spiritual a great mixture of that affection or passion which arises from natural principles; so that nature has a very great hand in those vehement motions and flights of the *passions* that appear. Hence the same degrees of divine communications from heaven shall have vastly different effects, in what outwardly appears, in persons of different natural tempers. The great mixture of that which is natural with that which is spiritual, is very manifest in the peculiar effects that divine influences have in some certain families, or persons of such a blood, in distinguishing the operations of the passions

and affections, and the manner of their outward expressions. I know some remarkable instances of this. The same is also evident by the different effects of divine communications on the same person at different times, and in different circumstances. The novelty of things, or the sudden transition from an opposite extreme, and many other things that might be mentioned, greatly contribute to the raising of the passions. And sometimes there is not only a mixture of that which is common and natural with gracious experience, but even that which is animal, what is in a great measure from the body, and is properly the result of the animal frame. In what true Christians feel of affections towards God, all is not always purely holy and divine; every thing that is felt in the affections does not arise from spiritual principles, but common and natural principles have a very great hand; an improper self-love may have a great share in the effect: God is not loved for his own sake, or for the excellency and beauty of his own perfections, as he ought to be; nor have these things in any wise that proportion in the effect that they ought to have. So, in the love true Christians have one to another, very often there is a great mixture of what arises from common and natural principles, with grace. Self-love has a great hand; the children of God are not loved purely for Christ's sake, but there may be a great mixture of that natural love which many sects of heretics have boasted of, who have been greatly united one to another, because they were of their company, on their side, against the rest of the world; yea, there may be a mixture of natural love to the opposite sex, with christian and divine love. So there may be a great mixture in that sorrow for sin which the godly have, and also in their joys; natural principles may greatly contribute to what is felt, a great many ways, as might easily be shown. There is nothing that belongs to christian experience more liable to a corrupt mixture of zeal. Though it be an excellent virtue, a heavenly flame, when it is pure; yet as it is exercised in those who are so little sanctified, and so little humbled, as we are in the present state, it is very apt to be mixed with human passion, yea with corrupt, hateful affections, pride and uncharitable bitterness, and other things that are not from heaven, but from hell.

Another thing often mixed with what is spiritual in the experiences of Christians, is an impression on the imagination; whereby godly persons, together with a spiritual understanding of divine things, and conviction of their reality and certainty, and a deep sense of their excellency or great importance upon their hearts, have strongly impressed on their minds external ideas or images of things. A degree of imagination in such a case, is unavoidable, and necessarily arises from human nature, as constituted in the present state; and often is of great benefit; but, when it is in too great a degree, it becomes an impure mixture that is prejudicial. This mixture very often arises from the constitution of the body. It commonly greatly contributes to the other kind

of mixture mentioned before, *viz.* of natural affections and passions; it helps to raise them to a great height.

Another thing that is often mixed with the experiences of true Christians, which is the worst mixture of all, is a degree of self-righteousness or spiritual pride. This is often mixed with the joys of Christians. Their joy is not purely the joy of faith, or a rejoicing in Christ Jesus, but is partly a rejoicing in themselves. There is oftentimes in their elevations a looking upon themselves, and a viewing their own high attainments; they rejoice partly because they are taken with their own experiences and great discoveries, which makes them in their own apprehensions so to excel; and this heightens all their passions, and especially those effects that are more external.

There is a much greater mixture of these things in the experiences of some Christians than others; in some the mixture is so great, as very much to obscure and hide the beauty of grace in them, like a thick smoke that hinders all the shining of the fire.

These things we ought to be well aware of, that we may not take all for gold that glisters, and that we may know what to countenance and encourage, and what to discourage; otherwise Satan will have a vast advantage against us, for he works in the corrupt mixture. Sometimes, for want of persons distinguishing the ore from the pure metal, those experiences are most admired by the persons themselves and by others that are not the most excellent. The great external effects, and vehemence of the passions, and violent agitations of the animal spirits, is sometimes much owing to the corrupt mixture, (as is very apparent in some instances,) though it be not always so.

I have observed a great difference among those of high affections, who seem disposed to be earnestly talking to those about them. Some insist much more, in their talk, on what they behold in God and Christ, the glory of the divine perfections, Christ's beauty and excellency, and wonderful condescension and grace, and their own unworthiness, and the great and infinite obligations that they themselves and others are under to love and serve God; others insist almost wholly on their own high privileges, their assurance of God's love and favour, and the weakness and wickedness of opposers, and how much they are above their reach. The latter may have much of the presence of God, but their experiences do not appear to be so solid and unmixed as the former. And there is a great deal of difference in persons' earnestness in their talk and behaviour. In some it seems to come from the fulness of their hearts, and from the great sense they have of truth. They have a deep sense of the certainty and infinite greatness, excellency, and importance of divine and eternal things, attended with all appearances of great humility. In others their earnestness seems to arise from a great mixture of human passion, and an undue and intemperate agitation of the spirits, which appears by their earnestness and vehemence not being proportioned to the nature of the subject

they insist on, but they are violent in every thing they say, as much when they are talking of things of smaller importance, as when speaking of things of greater weight. I have seen it thus in an instance or two, in which this vehemence at length issued in distraction. And there have been some few instances of a more extraordinary nature still, even of persons finding themselves disposed earnestly to talk and cry out, from an unaccountable kind of bodily pressure, without any extraordinary view of any thing in their minds, or sense of any thing upon their hearts; wherein probably there was the immediate hand of the devil.

II. Another thing, by which the devil has great advantage, is the unheeded *defects* there sometimes are in the experiences of true Christians, connected with those high affections wherein there is much that is truly good.

What I now have respect to, is something diverse from that defect, or imperfection of degree, which is in every holy disposition and exercise in this life, in the best of the saints. What I aim at is experiences being especially defective in some particular thing that ought to be in them; which, though it be not an essential defect, or such as is in the experiences of hypocrites, which renders them utterly vain, monstrous, and altogether abominable to God, is such as maims and deforms the experience. The essence of truly Christian experiences is not wanting, but that is wanting which is very needful in order to the proper beauty of the image of Christ in such a person's experiences. Things are very much out of a due proportion; there is indeed much of some things, but at the same time there is so little of some other things that should bear a proportion, that the defect very much deforms the Christian, and is truly odious in the sight of God.

What I observed before was something *too much*, something mixed, not belonging to the Christian as such; what I speak of now is something *not enough*, something wanting that does belong to the Christian as such. The one deforms the Christian as a monstrous excrescence; by the other the new creature is maimed, some member in a great measure is wanting, or so small and withering as to be very much out of due proportion. This is another spiritual calamity that the saints are liable to through the great imperfection of grace in this life. Thus the chicken in the egg, in the beginning of its formation, has indeed the rudiments or lineaments of all the parts; yet some few parts only are plainly seen, when others are hid, so that without a microscope it appears very monstrous.

When this deficiency and disproportion is great, as sometimes it is in real saints, it is not only a great deformity in itself, but has many ill consequences; it gives the devil great advantage, leaves a door open for corruption, exposes to very deformed and unlovely actions, and issues oftentimes in the great wounding of the soul.

For the better understanding of this matter, we may observe, that God, in the revelation that he has made of himself to the world by Jesus Christ, has taken care to give a proportionable manifestation of two kinds of excellencies or perfections of his nature, *viz.* those that especially tend to possess us with awe and reverence, and to search and humble us; and those that tend to win, to draw, and encourage us. By *the one*, he appears as an infinitely great, pure, holy, and heart-searching judge; by *the other*, as a gentle and gracious father and a loving friend. By the one, he is a pure, searching, and burning flame; by the other, a sweet, refreshing light. These two kinds of attributes are as it were admirably tempered together in the revelation of the gospel. There is a proportionable manifestation of justice and mercy, holiness and grace, majesty and gentleness, authority and condescension. God hath thus ordered that his diverse excellencies, as he reveals himself in the face of Jesus Christ, should have a proportionable manifestation, herein providing for our necessities. He knew it to be of great consequence that our apprehensions of these diverse perfections of his nature should be duly proportioned one to another. A defect on the one hand, *viz.* having a discovery of his love and grace, without a proportionable discovery of his awful majesty, his holy and searching purity, would tend to spiritual pride, carnal confidence, and presumption; and a defect on the other hand, *viz.* having a discovery of his holy majesty, without a proportionable discovery of his grace, tends to unbelief, a sinful fearfulness and spirit of bondage. And therefore herein chiefly consists that deficiency of experiences that I am now speaking of. The revelation God has made of himself in his word, and the provision made for our spiritual welfare in the gospel, are perfect; but the actual light and communications we have, are many ways exceeding imperfect and maimed. And experience plainly shows, that Christians may have high manifestations in some respects, and yet their circumstances may be unhappy in this regard, that their discoveries are no more general. There is a great difference among Christians in this respect; some have much more general discoveries than others, who are upon many accounts the most amiable Christians. Christians may have experiences that are very high, and yet there may be very much of this deficiency and disproportion. Their high experiences are truly from the Spirit of God, but sin comes in by the defect, (as indeed all sin is originally from a defective, privative cause,) and in such a case high discoveries, at the same time that they are enjoyed, may be and sometimes are the occasion, or *causa sine qua non*, of sin. Sin may come in at the back door, the gap that is left open; as spiritual pride often does. And many times the Spirit of God is quenched by this means, and God punishes the pride and presumption that rises, by bringing such darkness, and suffering such awful consequences and horrid temptations, as are enough to make one's hair stand on end to hear them.—Christians therefore should diligently observe their own hearts as to this matter,

and should pray to God that he would give them experiences in which one thing may bear a proportion to another, that God may be honoured and their souls edified thereby; and ministers should have an eye to this, in their private dealings with the souls of their people.

It is chiefly from such a defect of experiences that some things have arisen which have been pretty common among true Christians of late, though supposed by many to have risen from a good cause; as particularly, talking of divine and heavenly things, and expressing divine joys, with laughter or light behaviour. I believe in many instances such things have arisen from a good cause, as their *causa sine qua non*. High discoveries and gracious joyful affections have been the *occasion* of them; but the proper *cause* has been sin, even that odious defect in their experience, whereby there has been wanting a sense of the awful and holy majesty of God as present with them, and their nothingness and vileness before him, proportionable to the sense they have had of God's grace and the love of Christ. And the same is true in many cases of unsuitable boldness; a disposition to speak with authority, intemperate zeal, and many other things that sometimes appear under great religious affections.

And sometimes the vehemence of the motion of the animal spirits, under great affections, is owing in considerable measure to experiences being thus partial. I have known it in several instances, that persons have been greatly affected with the dying love of Christ, and the consideration of the happiness of the enjoyment of him in heaven, and other things of that nature, and their animal spirits at the same time have been in great emotion; but in the midst of it they have had such a deep sense of the awful, holy majesty of God, as at once composed them, and quieted animal nature, without diminishing their comfort, but only has made it of a better and more solid nature. When they have had a sense both of the majesty and grace of God, one thing has as it were balanced another, and caused a more happy sedateness and composure of body and mind.

From these things we may learn how to judge of experiences, and to estimate their goodness. Those are not always the best which are attended with the most violent affections, and most vehement motions of the animal spirits, or have the greatest effects on the body. Nor are they always the best, that most dispose persons to abound in talk to others, and to speak in the most vehement manner, though these things often arise from the greatness of spiritual experiences. But those are the most excellent experiences that are qualified as follows:

1. That have the least mixture, or are the most purely spiritual.
2. That are the least deficient and partial, in which the diverse things that appertain to Christian experience are proportionable one to another. And,

3. That are raised to the highest degree. It is no matter how high they are raised if they are qualified as before mentioned, the higher the better. Experiences, thus qualified, will be attended with the most amiable behaviour, will bring forth the most solid and sweet fruits, will be the most durable, and will have the greatest effect on the abiding temper of the soul.

If God is pleased to carry on this work, and it should prove to be the dawning of a general revival of the christian church, it may be expected that the time will come before long, when the experiences of Christians shall be much more generally thus qualified. We must expect green fruits before we have ripe ones. It is probable that hereafter the discoveries which the saints shall have of divine things, will be in a much higher degree than yet have been; but yet shall be so ordered of an infinitely wise and all sufficient God, that they shall not have so great an effect, in proportion, on the body, and will be less oppressive to nature. The outward manifestations will rather be like those that were in *Stephen*, when he was full of the Holy Ghost, when Acts vi. 15. “all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” Their inward fulness of the Spirit of God, in his divine, amiable, and sweet influences, shall as it were shine forth in a heavenly aspect, and the manner of speech and behaviour.—But,

III. There is another thing concerning the experiences of Christians, of which it is of yet greater importance that we should be aware, than of the preceding, and that is the *degenerating of experiences*. What I mean is something diverse from the mere decay of experiences, or their gradually vanishing, by persons losing their sense of things; *viz.* experiences growing by degrees worse and worse in their kind, more and more partial and deficient; in which things are more out of due proportion, and also have more and more of a corrupt mixture; the spiritual part decreases, and the other useless and hurtful parts greatly increase. This I have seen in very many instances; and great are the mischiefs that have risen through want of being more aware of it.

There is commonly, as I observed before, in high experiences, besides that which is spiritual, a mixture of three things, *viz.* natural or common affections, workings of the imagination, and a degree of self-righteousness or spiritual pride. Now it often comes to pass, that through persons not distinguishing the wheat from the chaff, and for want of watchfulness and humble jealousy of themselves—and by laying great weight on the natural and imaginary part, yielding to it, and indulging it, whereby that part grows and increases, and the spiritual part decreases—the devil sets in, and works in the corrupt part, and cherishes it to his utmost. At length the experiences of some persons, who began well, come to little else but violent motions of carnal affections, with great heats of the imagination, a great degree of enthusiasm and swelling of spiritual pride; very much like some fruits which bud,

blossom, and kernel well, but afterwards are blasted with an excess of moisture; so that though the bulk is monstrously great, yet there is little else in it but what is useless and unwholesome. It appears to me very probable, that many of the heresies that have arisen, and sects that have appeared in the christian world, in one age and another, with wild enthusiastic notions and practices, began at first by this means, that it was such a degenerating of experiences which first gave rise to them, or at least led the way to them.

There is nothing in the world so much exposes to this, as an unheeded spiritual pride and self-confidence, and persons being conceited of their own stock, without an humble, daily, and continual dependence on God. And this very thing seems to be typified of old, by the corrupting of the *manna*. Some of the children of Israel, because they had gathered a store of *manna* trusted in it; there being, as they apprehended, sufficient in the store they had gathered and laid up, without humbly looking to heaven, and stooping to the earth, for daily supplies; and the consequence was, that their *manna* bred worms and stank, Exod. xvi. 20.. Pride above all things promotes this degeneracy of experiences, because it grieves and quenches the Spirit of the Lamb of God; and so it kills the spiritual part, cherishes the natural part, inflames the carnal affections, and heats the imagination.

The unhappy subject of such a degeneracy, for the most part, is not sensible of his own calamity; but because he finds himself still violently moved, has greater heats of zeal, and more vehement motions of his animal spirits, thinks himself fuller of the Spirit of God than ever. But indeed it is with him, as the apostle says of the Galatians, Gal. iii. 3. "Having begun in the Spirit, they are made perfect by the flesh."

By the mixture there is of *common* affection with love to God, the love of true Christians is liable to degenerate, and to be more and more built on a supposition of being his high and peculiar favourites, and less and less on an apprehension of the excellency of God's nature as he is in himself. So the joy of Christians, by reason of the mixture there is with spiritual joy, is liable to degenerate, and to become little else but joy in self, joy in a person's own supposed eminency, and distinction from others in the favour of God. So zeal, that at first might be in great part spiritual, yet, in a long continuance of opposition and controversy, may degenerate more and more into human and proud passion, and may come to bitterness, and even a degree of hatred. And so love to the brethren may by degrees come to little else but fondness, and zeal for a party; yea, through a mixture of a natural love to the opposite sex, may degenerate more and more, till it issues in that which is criminal and gross. And I leave it with those who are better acquainted with ecclesiastical history, to inquire whether such a degeneracy of affections as this, might not be the first thing that led the way, and gave occasion to the rise, of the abominable notions of some sects that have arisen, concerning the community of



women. However that is, yet certainly the mutual embraces and kisses of persons of different sexes, under the notion of christian love and holy kisses, are utterly to be disallowed and abominated, as having the most direct tendency quickly to turn christian love into unclean and brutish lust, which will not be the better, but ten times the worse, for being christened by the name of christian love.

I should also think it advisable, that meetings of young people, of both sexes, in the evening, by themselves, without a minister, or any elder people amongst them, for religious exercises, should be avoided. For though for the present, while their minds are greatly solemn with lively impressions, and a deep sense of divine things, there may appear no ill consequence; yet we must look to the further end of things, and guard against future dangers, and advantages that Satan might gain against us. As a lively, solemn sense of divine things on the minds of young persons may gradually decay, so there will be danger that an ill improvement of these meetings may gradually prevail; if not in any unsuitable behaviour while together in the meeting, yet, when they break up to go home, they may naturally consort together in couples, for other than religious purposes; and it may at last so terminate, that young persons may go to such meetings chiefly for the sake of such an opportunity for company-keeping.

The *defect* there sometimes is in the experiences of Christians exposes them to degenerate, as well as the mixture that they have. Deficient maimed experiences do sometimes become more and more so. The mind being wholly intent upon those things that are in view, and those that are most wanting being neglected, there is less and less of them, and so the gap for corruption to come in grows wider and wider. And commonly both these causes operate together.

We had need to be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy, as the apostle was over the christian Corinthians, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so our minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. God indeed will never suffer his true saints totally and finally to fall away, but yet may punish their pride and self-confidence, by suffering them to be long led into a dreadful wilderness, by the subtle serpent, to the great wounding of their own souls and the interest of religion.

And before I dismiss this head of the degenerating of experiences, I would mention one thing more that tends to it; and that is, persons aiming in their experience to go beyond the rule of God's word, i.e. aiming at that *which is indeed*, in some respect, beyond the rule. Thus some persons have endeavoured utterly to root out and abolish all natural affection, or any special affection or respect to their near relations, under a notion that no other love ought to be allowed but spiritual love, and that all other love is to be abolished as carnal, and that it becomes Christians to love none upon the

account of any thing else but the image of God; and that therefore love should go out to one and another only in that proportion in which the image of God is seen in them. They might as well argue that a man ought utterly to disallow of, and endeavour to abolish, all love or appetite to his daily food, under a notion that it is a carnal appetite, and that no other appetite should be tolerated but spiritual appetites. Why should the saints strive after that, as a high attainment in holiness, which the apostle in Rom. i. 31.. Mentions as one instance wherein the heathen had got to the most horrid pass in wickedness, *viz. being without natural affection?*

Some have doubted whether they might pray for the conversion and salvation of the souls of their children, any more than for the souls of others; because the salvation of the souls of others would be as much to God's glory, as the salvation of their children; and they have supposed that to pray most for their own, would show a selfish disposition. So they have been afraid to tolerate a compassionate grief and concern for their nearest friends; for fear it would be an argument of want of resignation to God.

And it is true, there is great danger of persons setting their hearts too much upon their earthly friends; our love to earthly friends ought to be under the government of the love of God, and should be attended with a spirit of submission and resignation to his will, and every thing should be subordinated to his glory. But that is no argument that these affections should be entirely abolished. The Creator of the world has put them in us, for the good of mankind, and because he saw they would be needful for them, as they must be united in society in the present state, and are of great use when kept in their proper place; and to endeavour totally to root them out, would be to reproach and oppose the wisdom of the Creator. Nor is the being of these natural inclinations, if well regulated, inconsistent with any part of our duty to God, or any argument of a sinful selfishness, any more than our natural abhorrence of pain, and the natural inclination to ease that was in the man Christ Jesus himself.

It is the duty of parents to be more concerned and to pray more for the salvation of their children, than for the children of their neighbours; as it is the duty of a minister to be more concerned for the salvation of the souls of his flock, and to pray more for them, than those of other congregations, because they are committed to his care. So our near friends are more committed to our care than others, and our near neighbours, than those that live at a great distance; and the people of our land and nation are more, in some sense, committed to our care than the people of *China*, and we ought to pray more for them, and to be more concerned that the kingdom of Christ should flourish among them, than in another country, where it would be as much, and no more, for the glory of God. Compassion ought to be especially exercised towards friends, Job vi. 14. Christ did not frown upon a special affection and

compassion for near friends; but rather countenanced and encouraged it, from time to time, in those who, in the exercise of such an affection and compassion, applied to him for relief for their friends; as in the instances of the woman of *Canaan*, *Jairus*, *Mary* and *Martha*, the centurion, the widow of *Nain*, and many others. The apostle *Paul*, though as much resigned and devoted to God, and under the power of his love, perhaps, as any mere man that ever lived, had a peculiar concern for his countrymen the *Jews*, the rather on that account, that they were his *brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh*. He had a very high degree of compassionate grief for them, insomuch that he tells us he had great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart for them, and could wish himself accursed from Christ for them.

There are many things are proper for the saints in heaven, which are not suitable to our state in this world; and for Christians, in these and other instances, to affect to go beyond the present state of mankind, and what God has appointed as fit for it, is an instance of that which the wise man calls *being righteous overmuch*, and has a tendency to open a door for Satan, and to cause religious affections to degenerate into something very unbecoming Christians.

Thus I have, as I proposed, taken notice of some things with regard to the inward experiences of Christians, by which *Satan* has an advantage.

I now proceed in the

2d. Place, to take notice of something with regard to the *external effects* of experiences, which also gives *Satan* an advantage. What I refer to, is the secret and unaccountable influence that custom has upon persons, with respect to the external effects and manifestations of the inward affections of the mind. By custom I mean, both a person's being accustomed to a thing in himself, in his own common, allowed, and indulged practice; and also the countenance and approbation of others amongst whom he dwells, by their general voice and practice. It is well known, and appears sufficiently by what I have said already in this treatise and elsewhere, that I am far from ascribing all the late uncommon effects and outward manifestations of inward experiences to custom and fashion, as some do; I know it to be otherwise, if it be possible for me to know any thing of this nature by the most critical observation, under all manner of opportunities of observing. But yet this also is exceeding evident by experience, that custom has a strange influence in these things. I know it by the different manners and degrees of external effects and manifestations of great affections and high discoveries, in different towns, according to what persons are gradually led into, and to which they are insensibly habituated, by example and custom; and also in the same place, at different times, according to their conduct. If some person conducts them, that much countenances and encourages such kind of outward manifestations of great affections, they naturally and insensibly prevail, and grow by

degrees unavoidable; but, when afterwards they come under another kind of conduct, the manner of external appearances will strangely alter. And yet it seems to be without any proper design or contrivance of those in whom there is this alteration; it is not properly affected by them, but the influence of example and custom is secret and insensible to the person themselves. These things have a vast influence in the manner of persons manifesting their joys, whether with smiles and an air of lightness, or whether with more solemnity and reverence; and so they have a great influence as to the dispositions persons have under high affections to abound in talk; and also as to the manner of their speaking, the loudness and vehemence of their speech. It would, however, be exceeding unjust, and against all the evidence of fact and experience, and the reason of things, to ascribe to custom all dispositions to be much in speaking to others, and to speak in a very earnest manner. It is manifest that example and custom has some way or other, a secret and unsearchable influence on those actions that are involuntary, in different places, and in the same places at different times.

Therefore, though it would be very unreasonable, and prejudicial to the interest of religion, to frown upon all these extraordinary external effects and manifestations of great religious affections. (for a measure of them is natural, necessary, and beautiful, and the effect in no wise disproportioned to the spiritual cause, and is of great benefit to promote religion) yet I think they greatly err who suppose that these things should be wholly unlimited, and that all should be encouraged in going to the utmost length that they feel themselves inclined to. There ought to be a general restraint upon these things, and there should be a prudent care taken of persons in such extraordinary circumstances and they should be moderately advised at proper seasons, not to make more ado than there is need of, but rather to hold a restraint upon their inclinations; otherwise extraordinary outward effects will grow upon them, they will be more and more natural and unavoidable, and the extraordinary outward show will increase, without any increase of the internal cause; persons will find themselves under a kind of necessity of making a great ado, with less and less affection of soul, till at length almost any slight emotion will set them going; and they will be more and more violent and boisterous, and will grow louder and louder, till their actions and behaviour become indeed very absurd. These things experience proves.

Thus I have taken notice of the more general causes whence the errors that have attended this great revival of religion have risen, and under each head have observed some particular errors that have flowed from these fountains. I now proceed as I proposed in the

*Second* place, to take notice of some particular errors that have risen from several of the preceding causes; in some perhaps they have been chiefly

owing to one, and in others to another, and in others to the influence of several, or all conjunctly. And here the

Censuring others.

1<sup>st</sup> Thing I would take notice of, is, censuring professing Christians, of good standing in the visible church, as unconverted. I need not repeat what I have elsewhere said to show this to be against the plain, frequent, and strict prohibitions of the word of God. It is the worst disease that has attended this work, most contrary to the spirit and rules of Christianity, and of the worst consequences. There is a most unhappy tincture that the minds of many, both ministers and people, have received that way. The manner of many has been, when they first enter into conversation with any person that seems to make any pretences to religion, to fix a judgment of him, from his manner of talking of religious things, whether he be converted, or experimentally acquainted with vital piety, or not; and then to treat him accordingly, and freely to express their thoughts of him to others, especially those of whom they have a good opinion, as true Christians, and accepted as brethren and companions in Christ. Or if they do not declare their minds expressly, yet by their manner of speaking of them, at least to their friends, they will show plainly what their thoughts are. So, when they have heard any minister pray or preach, their first work has been to observe him on a design of discerning him, whether he be a converted man or no; whether he prays like one that feels the saving power of God's Spirit in his heart, and whether he preaches like one that knows what he says. It has been so much the way in some places, that many new converts do not know but it is their duty to do so, they know no other way. And when once persons yield to such a notion, and give in to such a humour, they will quickly grow very discerning in their own apprehension, and think they can easily tell a hypocrite. And when once they have passed their censure, every thing seems to confirm it; they see more and more in the person they have censured, that seems to them to show plainly that he is an unconverted man. And then, if the person censured be a minister, every thing in his public performances seems dead and sapless, and to do them no good at all, but on the contrary to be of a deadening influence, and poisonous to the soul; yea, it seems worse and worse to them, his preaching grows more and more intolerable. Which is owing to a secret, strong prejudice, that steals in more and more upon the mind, as experience plainly and certainly shows. When the Spirit of God was wonderfully poured out in this place more than seven years ago, and near thirty souls in a week, take one with another, for five or six weeks together, were to appearance brought home to Christ, and all the town seemed to be alive and full of God, there was no such notion or humour prevailing here. When ministers preached here, as very many did at that time, young and old, our people did not go about to discern whether they were men of experience or not; they did not know that they must. Mr.

Stoddard never brought them up in that way; it did not seem natural to them to go about any thing of that nature, nor did any such thing enter into their hearts; but, when any minister preached, the business of every one was to listen and attend to what he said, and apply it to his own heart, and make the utmost improvement of it. And it is remarkable, that never did there appear such a disposition in the people to relish, approve of, and admire ministers' preaching as at that time. Such expressions as these were frequent in the mouths of one and another, on occasion of the preaching of strangers here, *viz. That they rejoiced there were so many such eminent ministers in the country; and they wondered they never heard the fame of them before. They were thankful that other towns had so good means;* and the like. And scarcely ever did any minister preach here, but his preaching did some remarkable service; as I had good opportunity to know, because at that time I had particular acquaintance with most of the persons in the town, in their soul-concerns. That it has been so much otherwise of late in many places in the land is another instance of the secret and powerful influence of custom and example.

There has been an unhappy disposition in some ministers toward their brethren in the ministry in this respect, which has encouraged and greatly promoted such a spirit among some of their people. A wrong improvement has been made of Christ's scourging the buyers and sellers out of the temple. It has been expected by some, that Christ was now about thus to purge his house of unconverted ministers; and this has made it more natural to them to think that they should do Christ service, and act as co-workers with him, to put to their hand, and endeavour by all means to cashier those ministers that they thought to be unconverted. Indeed it appears to me probable that the time is coming when awful judgments will be executed on unfaithful ministers, and that no sort of men in the world will be so much exposed to divine judgments. But then we should leave that work to Christ, who is the searcher of hearts, and to whom vengeance belongs; and not, without warrant, take the scourge out of his hand into our own. There has been too much of a disposition in some, as it were, to give ministers over as reprobates, being looked upon as wolves in sheeps' clothing; which has tended to promote and encourage a spirit of bitterness towards them, and to make it natural to treat them too much as if they knew God hated them. If God's children knew that others were reprobates it would not be required of them to love them; we may hate those that we know God hates; as it is lawful to hate the devil, and as the saints at the day of judgment will hate the wicked.\* Some have been too apt to look for fire from heaven upon particular ministers; and this has naturally excited that disposition to call for it, which Christ rebuked in his disciples at *Samaria*. For my part, though I believe no sort of men on earth are so exposed to spiritual judgments as wicked ministers, yet I feel no

disposition to treat any minister as if I supposed that he was finally rejected of God; for I cannot but hope that there is coming a day of such great grace, a time so appointed for magnifying the riches and sovereignty of divine mercy, beyond what ever was, that a great number of unconverted ministers will obtain mercy. There were no sort of persons in Christ's time that were so guilty, and so hardened, and towards whom Christ manifested such great indignation, as the priests and scribes; and there were no such persecutors of Christ and his disciples as they. And yet in that great outpouring of the Spirit that began on the day of Pentecost, though it began with the common people, yet in the progress of the work, after awhile, *a great company of priests in Jerusalem were obedient to the faith*, Acts vi. 7. And *Saul*, one of the most violent of all the persecuting *Pharisees*, became afterwards the greatest promoter of the work of God that ever was. I hope we shall yet see in many instances a fulfilment of that in Isa. xxix. 24. "They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine."

Nothing has been gained by this practice. The end that some have aimed at in it has not been obtained, nor is ever like to be. Possibly some have openly censured ministers, and encourage their people's uneasiness under them, in hopes that the uneasiness would be so general, and so great, that unconverted ministers in general would be cast off, and then things would go on happily. But there is no likelihood of it. The devil indeed has obtained his end; this practice has bred a great deal of unhappiness among ministers and people, has spoiled Christians' enjoyment of Sabbaths, and made them their most uneasy, uncomfortable, and unprofitable days, and has stirred up great contention, and set all in a flame. In one place and another, where there was a glorious work of God's Spirit begun, it has in a great measure knocked all on the head, and their ministers hold their places. Some have aimed at a better end in censuring ministers; they have supposed it to be a likely means to awaken them. Whereas indeed no one thing has had so great a tendency to prevent the awakening of disaffected ministers in general; and no one thing has actually had such influence to lock up the minds of ministers against any good effect of this great work of God in the land. I have known instances of some who seemed to be much moved by the first appearance of this work, but since have seemed to be greatly deadened by what has appeared of this nature. And, if there be one or two instances of ministers who have been awakened by it, there are ten to one on whom it has had a contrary influence. The worst enemies of this work have been inwardly caused by this practice; they have made a shield of it to defend their consciences, and have been glad that it has been carried to so great a length; at the same time that they have looked upon it, and improved it, as a door opened for them to be more bold in opposing the work in general.

There is no such dreadful danger of natural men being undone by our forbearing thus to censure them, and carrying it towards them as visible Christians. It will be no bloody hell-peopling charity, as some seem to suppose, when we only allow them to be worthy of a public charity, on their profession and good external behaviour; any more than *Judas* was in danger of being deceived, by Christ's treating him a long time as a disciple, and sending him forth as an apostle. Christ did not then take it upon him to act as the judge and searcher of hearts, but only as the head of the visible church. Indeed such a charity as this may be abused by some, as every thing is, and will be, that is in its own nature proper, and of never so good tendency. I say nothing against dealing thoroughly with conscience, by the most convincing and searching dispensation of the word of God. I do not desire that sword should be sheathed, or gently handled by ministers; but let it used as a two-edged sword, to pierce, even to the dividing asunder soul and spirit, joints and marrow; let ministers handle it in flaming fire, without having any more mercy on it, than the furnace has on those metals that are tried in it. But we should let men's persons alone; let the word of God judge them, but let us not take it upon use till we have a warrant for it.

Some have been ready to censure ministers because they seem, in comparison of some other ministers, to be very cold and lifeless in their ministerial performances. But then it should be considered, that, for ought we know, God may hereafter raise up ministers of so much more excellent and heavenly qualifications, and so much more spiritual and divine in their performances, that there may appear as great a difference between them, and those who now seem the most lively, as there is now between them, and others that are called dead and sapless. And those that are now called lively ministers may appear to their hearers, when they compare them with others who shall excel them, as wretchedly mean, and their performances poor, dead, dry things; and many may be ready to be prejudiced against them, as accounting them good for nothing, and, it may be, calling them soul-murderers. What a poor figure may we suppose the most lively of us, and those that are most admired by the people, make in the eyes of one of the saints of heaven, any otherwise than as their deadness, deformity, and rottenness is hid by the veil of Christ's righteousness!

Another thing that has been supposed to be sufficient warrant for openly censuring ministers as unconverted, is their opposing this work of God that has lately been carried on in the land. And there can be no doubt with me but that opposition against this work may be such, as to render either ministers or people truly scandalous, and expose them to public ecclesiastical censure; and that ministers hereby may utterly defeat the design of their ministry, (as I observed before,) and so give their people just cause of uneasiness. I should not think that any person had power to oblige me constantly to attend the



ministry of one who did from time to time plainly pray and preach against this work, or speak reproachfully of it frequently in his public performances, after all christian methods had been used for a remedy, and to no purpose.

But to determine how far opposing this work is consistent with a state of grace, is, as experience shows, a very difficult thing; who can tell how far, and for how long time, some persons of good experience in their own souls may proceed, through prejudices they have received from the errors that have been mixed with this work, or through some peculiar disadvantages they are under to behold things in a right view, by reason of the persons they converse with, or their own cold and dead frames? I have seen what abundantly convinces me, that the business is too high for me; I am glad that God has not committed such a difficult affair to me; I can joyfully leave it wholly in his hands, who is infinitely fit for it, without meddling at all with it myself. We may represent it as exceeding dangerous to oppose this work, for this we have good warrant in the word of God; but I know of no necessity we are under to determine whether it be possible for those that are guilty of it to be in a state of grace or no.

God seems so strictly to have forbidden our judging our brethren in the visible church, no only because he knew that we were infinitely too weak, fallible, and blind, to be well capacitated for it, but also because he knew that it was not a work suited to our proud hearts; that it would be setting us vastly too high, and making us too much of lords over our fellow-creatures. Judging our brethren, and passing a condemnatory sentence upon them, seems to carry in it an act of *authority*, especially to sentence them with respect to that state of their hearts, on which depends their liableness to eternal damnation. This is evident by such interrogations as the following, to hear which from God's mouth, is enough to make us shrink into nothing with shame and confusion, under a sense of our own blindness and worthlessness, Rom. xiv. 4. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." And James iv. 12. "There is one lawgiver that is able to save and to destroy; who art thou that judgest another?" Our wise and merciful Shepherd has graciously taken care not to lay in our way such a temptation to pride; he has cut up all such poison out of our pasture; and therefore we should not desire to have it restored. Blessed be his name, that he has not laid such a temptation in the way of my pride! I know that, in order to be fit for this business, I must not only be vastly more knowing, but more humble than I am.

Though I believe some of God's own children have of late been very guilty in this matter, yet, by what is said of it in the Scripture, it appears to me very likely, that God will awfully rebuke that practice. May it in sovereign and infinite mercy be prevented, by the deep and open humiliation of those that have openly practised it!

As this practice ought to be avoided, so should all such open, visible marks of distinction and separation that imply it, (as particularly, distinguishing such as we have judged to be in a converted state with the compellations of *brother* or *sister*, any further than there is a visible ecclesiastical distinction. In those places where it is the manner to receive such, and such only, to the communion of the visible church, as recommend themselves by giving a satisfying account of their inward experiences, there Christians may openly distinguish such persons, in their speech and ordinary behaviour, with a visible separation, without being inconsistent with themselves. I do not now pretend to meddle with that controversy, whether such an account of experience be requisite to church-fellowship. But certainly, to admit persons to communion with us as brethren in the visible church, and then visibly to reject them, and to make an open distinction between them and others, by different names or appellations, is to be inconsistent with ourselves. It is to make a visible church within a visible church, and visibly to divide between sheep and goats, setting one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

This bitter root of censoriousness must be totally rooted out, as we would prepare the way of the Lord. It has nourished and upheld many other things contrary to the humility, meekness, and love of the gospel. The minds of many have received an unhappy turn, with their religion; there is a certain point or sharpness, a disposition to a kind of warmth, that does not savour of that meek, lamb-like, sweet disposition that becomes Christians. Many have now been so long habituated to it, that they do not know how to get out of it; but we must get out of it; the point and sharpness must be blunted, and we must learn another way of manifesting our zeal for God.

There is a way of reflecting on others, and censuring them in open prayer; which, though it has a fair show of love, is indeed the boldest way of reproaching others imaginable; because there is implied in it an appeal to the most high God, concerning the truth of their censures and reflections.

And here I would also observe by the way, that some have a way of joining a sort of imprecations with their petitions for others, though but conditional ones, that appear to me wholly needless and improper. They pray that others may either be converted or removed. I never heard nor read of any such thing practised in the church of God till now, unless it be with respect to some of the most visibly and notoriously abandoned enemies of the church of God. This is a sort of cursing men in our prayers, adding a curse with our blessing; whereas the rule is, *Bless, and curse not*. To pray that God would kill another, is to curse him as *Elisha* cursed the children who came out of *Bethel*. And the case must be very great and extraordinary indeed to warrant it, unless we were prophets, and did not speak our own words, but words indited by the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of God. It is pleaded, that if God has no design of converting others, it is best for them and others, that

they should be immediately taken away and sent to hell before they have contracted more guilt. To which I would say, that so it was best for those children who met *Elisha*, seeing God had no design of converting them, to die immediately, as they did; but yet *Elisha's* imprecating that sudden death upon them, was cursing them; and therefore would not have been lawful for one who did not speak in the name of the Lord as a prophet.

And then, if we give way to such things as these, where shall we stop? A child that suspects he has an unconverted father and mother, may pray openly that his father and mother may either be converted, or taken away and sent to hell now quickly, before their guilt is greater. (For unconverted parents are as likely to poison the souls of their family in their manner of training them up, as unconverted ministers are to poison their people.) And so it might come to be a common thing all over the country, for children to pray after this manner concerning their parents, brethren and sisters concerning one another, husbands concerning their wives, and wives concerning their husbands; and so for persons to pray concerning all their unconverted friends and neighbours. And not only so, but we may also pray concerning all those saints who are not lively Christians, that they may either be enlivened or taken away; if that be true which is often said by some at this day, that these cold dead saints do more hurt than natural men, and lead more souls to hell, and that it would be well for mankind if they were all dead.

How needless are such petitions or imprecations as these! What benefit is there of them? Is it not sufficient for us to pray that God would provide for his church and the good of souls, take care of his own flock, and give it needful means and advantages for its spiritual prosperity? Does God need to be directed by us in what way he shall do it? What need we ask of God to do it by killing such and such persons, if he do not convert them? unless we delight in the thoughts of God's answering us in such terrible ways, and with such awful manifestations of his wrath to our fellow-creatures.

And why do not ministers direct sinners to pray for themselves, that God would either convert them or kill them, and send them to hell now, before their guilt is greater? In this way we should lead persons in the next place to self-murder; for many probably would soon begin to think, that what they may pray for, they may seek by the use of means of.

Some, with whom I have discoursed about this way of praying, have said, That the Spirit of God, as it were, forces out such words from their mouths, when otherwise they should not dare to utter them. But such kind of impulse does not look like the influence of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God indeed sometimes strongly inclines men to utter words; not by putting expressions into the mouth, and urging to utter them, but by filling the heart with a sense of divine things, and holy affections, whence the mouth speaks. That other

way of being urged to use certain expressions, by an unaccountable force, is very probably from the influence of the devil.

2. Another thing I would take notice of, in the management of which there has been much error and misconduct, is lay-exhorting; about which there has been abundance of disputing, jangling, and contention.

In the midst of these disputes, I suppose that all are agreed as to these two things, *viz.*

1. That all exhorting one another by lay-men is not unlawful or improper; but, on the contrary, that such exhorting is a Christian duty. And,

2. I suppose also, all will allow that there is some kind or way of exhorting and teaching which belongs only to the *office of teachers*. All will allow that God has appointed such an office as that of *teachers* in the christian church, and therefore doubtless will allow that something or other is proper and peculiar to that office, or some business of *teaching* that does not belong as much to others as to them.

If there be any way of teaching that is peculiar to that office, then for others to take that upon them, is to invade the office of a minister; which doubtless is very sinful, and is often so represented in Scripture. But the great difficulty is to settle the bounds, and to tell exactly how far lay-men may go, and when they exceed their limits; which is a matter of so much difficulty, that I do not wonder if many in their zeal have transgressed. The two ways of teaching and exhorting, the one of which ought ordinarily to be left to ministers, and the other of which may and ought to be practised by the people, may be expressed by those two name of *preaching*, and *exhorting* in way of *Christian conversation*. But then a great deal of difficulty and controversy arises to determine what is *preaching*, and what is *Christian conversation*. However, I will humbly offer my thoughts concerning this subject of lay-exhorting, as follows.

I. The common people, in exhorting one another, ought not to clothe themselves with the like authority with that which is proper for ministers. There is a certain authority that ministers have and should exercise in teaching, as well as in governing the flock. Teaching is spoken of in Scripture as an act of authority, 1 Tim. ii. 12. In order to a man's preaching, special authority must be committed to him, "How shall they preach, except they be sent?" Ministers in this work of teaching and exhorting are clothed with authority, as Christ's messengers, Mal. ii. 7. as representing him, and so speaking in his name, and in his stead, 2 Cor. v. 18-20. And it seems to be the most honourable thing that belongs to the office of a minister of the gospel, that to him is committed the word of reconciliation, and that he has power to preach the gospel, as Christ's messenger, and speaking in his name. The apostle seems to speak of it as such, 1 Cor. i. 16, 17. Ministers therefore, in the exercise of this power, may clothe themselves with authority in speaking, or

may teach others in an authoritative manner, “These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority; Let no man despise thee.” But the common people, in exhorting one another, ought not thus to exhort in an authoritative manner. There is a great deal of difference between teaching as a *father* amongst a company of children, and counselling in a *brotherly* way, as the children may kindly counsel and admonish one another. Those that are mere brethren ought not to assume authority in exhorting, though one may be better, and have more experience, than another. Lay-men ought not to exhort as though they were the ambassadors or messengers of Christ, as ministers do; nor should they exhort, warn, and charge *in his name*, according to the ordinary import of such an expression, when applied to teaching.—Indeed in one sense, a Christian ought to do every thing he does in religion in the name of Christ, *i.e.* he ought to act in a dependence on him as his head and mediator, and do all for his glory. But the expression, as it is usually understood, when applied to teaching or exhorting, is speaking in Christ’s stead, and as having a message from him.

Persons may clothe themselves with authority in speaking, either by the authoritative words they make use of, or in the manner and authoritative air of their speaking. Though some may think that this latter is a matter of indifference, or at least of small importance, yet there is indeed a great deal in it; a person may go much out of his place, and be guilty of a great degree of assuming, in the manner of his speaking those words, which, as they might be spoken, might be proper for him.—The same words, spoken in a different manner, may express what is very diverse. Doubtless there may be as much hurt in the manner of a person’s speaking, as there may in his looks; but the wise man tells us, that *an high look is an abomination to the Lord*, Prov. xxi. 4. Again, a man may clothe himself with authority, in the circumstances under which he speaks; as for instance, if he sets himself up as a *public teacher*. Here I would have it observed, that I do not suppose that a person is guilty of this, merely because he speaks in the hearing of many. Persons may speak only in a conversation, and yet speak in the hearing of a great number, as they often do in their common conversation about temporal things, at feasts and entertainments, where women as well as others converse freely together, in the hearing it may be of a great number, and yet without offence. And if their conversation on such occasions should turn on spiritual things, and they should speak as freely and openly, I do not see why it would not be as harmless. Nor do I think, that besides a great number being present, persons speaking with a very earnest and loud voice, is for them to set up themselves as public teachers, if they do it from no contrivance or premeditated design, or as purposely directing themselves to a congregation or multitude. But persons speaking in conversation, or when all freely converse one with another—directing themselves to none but those that are near them, and fall in

their way—in that earnest and pathetic manner, to which the subject naturally leads, and as it were constrains them: I say, that for persons to do such, though many happen to hear them, does not appear to me to be setting themselves up as public teachers. Yea, suppose all this happens to hear them, does not appear to me to be setting themselves up as public teachers. Yea, suppose all this happens to be in a meeting-house; I do not think that this much alters the case, provided the solemnity of public service and divine ordinances be over; and provided also that they speak in no authoritative way, but in an humble manner, becoming their degree and station, though they speak very earnestly and pathetically.

Indeed modesty might in ordinary cases restrain some persons (as women and those that are young) from so much as speaking when a great number are present, at least, when some of those present are much their superiors, unless they are spoken to. And yet, the case may be so extraordinary as fully to warrant it. If something very extraordinary happens to persons, or if they are in extraordinary circumstances; as if a person be struck with lightning in the midst of a great company, or if he lies a-dying, it appears to none any violation of modesty for him to speak freely before those that are much his superiors. I have seen some women and children in such circumstances, on religious accounts, that it has appeared to me no more a transgressing the laws of humility and modesty for them to speak freely, let who will be present, than if they were in danger of dying.

But then may a man be said to set up himself as a public teacher, when in a set speech, of design, he directs himself to a multitude, as looking that they should compose themselves to attend to what he has to say. And much more when this is a contrived and premeditated thing, without any thing like a constraint by an extraordinary sense or affection; and more still, when meetings are appointed on purpose to hear lay-persons exhort, and they take it as their business to be speakers, while they expect that others should come, and compose themselves and attend as hearers. When private Christians take it upon them in private meetings to act as the masters or presidents of the assembly, and accordingly from time to time to teach and exhort the rest, this has the appearance of authoritative teaching.

When private Christians, who are no more then mere brethren, exhort and admonish one another, it ought to be in an humble manner, rather by way of entreaty, than with authority; and the more, according as the station of persons is lower. Thus it becomes women, and those that are young, ordinarily to be at a greater distance from any appearance or authority in speaking than others. Thus much at least is evident by 1 Tim. ii. 9, 11, 12.

That lay persons ought not to exhort one another as clothed with authority, is a general rule; but it cannot justly be supposed to extend to heads of families in their own families. Every christian family is a little church, and

the heads of it are its authoritative teachers and governors. Nor can it extend to schoolmasters among their scholars; and some other cases might perhaps be mentioned, that ordinary discretion will distinguish, where a man's circumstances do properly clothe him with authority, and render it fit and suitable for him to counsel and admonish others in an authoritative manner.

2. No man but a minister duly appointed to that sacred calling, ought to follow teaching and exhorting *as a calling*, or so as to neglect that which is his *proper calling*. Having the office of a teacher in the church of God implies two things:

1. A being invested with the *authority* of a teacher; and

2. A being called to the *business* of a *teacher*, to make it the business of his life.

Therefore that man who is not a minister, taking either of these upon him, invades the office of a minister. Concerning assuming the authority of a minister I have spoken already. But if a lay-man do not assume authority in his teaching, yet if he forsakes his proper calling, or doth so at least in a great measure, and spends his time in going about from house to house to counsel and exhort, he goes beyond his line, and violates christian rules. Those that have the office of teachers or exhorters, have it for their calling, and should make it their business, as a business proper to their office; and none should make it their business but such, Rom. xii. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8. "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the proportion of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we being many, are one body in Christ. He that teacheth let him wait on teaching, or he that exhorteth, on exhortation." 1 Cor. xii. 29. "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers?" 1 Cor. vii. 20. "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." 1 Thess. iv. 11. "And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you."

It will be a very dangerous thing for lay-men, in either of these respects, to invade the office of minister. If this be common among us, we shall be in danger of having a stop put to the work of God, of the ark turning aside from us, before it comes to mount *Zion*, and of God making a breach upon us; as of old there was an unhappy stop put to the joy of the congregation of Israel, in bringing up the ark of God, because others carried it besides the *Levites*. And therefore *David*, when the error was found out, says, "None ought to carry the ark of God, but the *Levites* only; for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever." And because one presumed to touch the ark who was not of the sons of *Aaron*, therefore the

Lord made a breach upon them, and covered their day of rejoicing with a cloud in his anger.

Before I dismiss this head of lay-exhorting, I would take notice of three things relating to it, upon which there ought to be a restraint.

1. Speaking in the time of the solemn worship of God; as public prayer, singing, or preaching, or administration of the sacrament of the holy supper, or any duty of social worship. This should not be allowed. I know it will be said, that in some cases, when persons are exceedingly affected, they cannot help it; and I believe so too; but then I also believe, and know by experience, that there are several things which contribute to that inability, besides merely and absolutely the sense of divine things upon their hearts. Custom and example, or the thing being allowed, have such an influence, that they actually help to make it impossible for persons under strong affections to avoid speaking. If it was disallowed, and persons at the time that they were thus disposed to break out, had this apprehension, that it would be very unbecoming for them so to do, it would contribute to their ability to avoid it. Their inability arises from their strong and vehement disposition; and, so far as that disposition is from a good principle, it would be weakened by this thought, *viz.* "What I am going to do, will be for the dishonour of Christ and religion." And so the inward vehemence, that pushed them forward to speak, would fall, and they would be enabled to avoid it. This experience confirms.

2. There ought to be a moderate restraint on the loudness of person's talking under high affections; for, if there be not, it will grow natural and unavoidable for persons to be louder and louder, without any increase of their inward sense; till it becomes natural to them, at last, to scream and halloo to almost every one they see in the streets, when they are much affected. But this is certainly very improper, and what has no tendency to promote religion. The man Christ Jesus, when he was upon earth, had doubtless as great a sense of the infinite greatness and importance of eternal things, and the worth of souls, as any have now; but there is not the least appearance in his history, of his taking any such course, or manner of exhorting others.

3. There should also be some restraint on the abundance of talk, under strong affections; for, if persons give themselves an unbounded liberty to talk just so much as they feel an inclination to, they will increase and abound more and more in talk, beyond the proportion of their sense or affection; till at length it will become ineffectual on those that hear them, and, by the commonness of their abundant talk, they will defeat their own end.

One thing more of which I would take notice, before I conclude this part, is the mismanagement of singing praises to God. I believe it to have been one fruit of the extraordinary degrees of the sweet and joyful influence of the Spirit of God, that there has appeared such a disposition to abound in this divine exercise; not only in appointed solemn meetings, but when Christians



occasionally meet together at each other's houses. But the mismanagement I have respect to is a way of performing it, without almost any appearance of that reverence and solemnity with which all visible, open acts of divine worship ought to be attended. It may be two or three are in a room singing hymns of praise to God, others talking at the same time, others about their work, with little more appearance of regard to what is doing, than if only singing a common song for their amusement and diversion. There is danger, if such things are continued, that a mere nothing be made of this duty, to the great violation of the third commandment. Let Christians abound as much as they will in this holy, heavenly exercise, in God's house and in their own houses; but, let it be performed as a holy act, wherein they have immediately and visibly to do with God. When any social open act of devotion or solemn worship of God is performed, God should be revered as present. As we would not have the ark of God depart from us, nor provoke God to make a breach upon us, we should take heed that we handle the ark with reverence.

With respect to companies singing in the streets, going to or coming from the place of public worship, I would humbly offer my thoughts in the following particulars:

1. The rule of Christ, concerning *putting new wine into old bottles*, does undoubtedly take place in things of this nature, supposing the thing in itself is good, but not essential, and not particularly enjoined or forbidden. For things so very new and uncommon, and of so open and public a nature, to be suddenly introduced and set up and practised in many parts of the country, without the matter being so much as first proposed to any public consideration, or giving any opportunity for the people of God to weigh the matter, or to consider any reasons that might be offered to support it, is putting new wine into old bottles with a witness; as if it were with no other design than to burst them directly. Nothing else can be expected to be the consequence of this than uproar and confusion, great offence, and unhappy mischievous disputes, even among the children of God themselves. Not that what is good in itself, and is new, ought to be forborne, till there is nobody that will like it; but it ought to be forborne, till there is nobody that will like it; but it ought to be forborne till the visible church of God is so prepared for it, at least, that there is a probability it will not do more hurt than good, or hinder the work of God more than promote it; as is more evident from Christ's rule, and the apostles' practice. If it be brought in when the country is so unprepared, that the shock and surprise, the contention and prejudice against religion it is like to occasion, will do more to hinder religion, then the practice is like to promote it, then the fruit is picked before it is ripe. And, indeed, such a hasty endeavour to introduce an innovation, supposing it to be good in *itself*, is the likeliest way to retard the effectual introduction of it; it will hinder its being

extensively introduced, much more than it will promote it, and so will defeat its own end. But,

As to the thing itself, if a considerable part of a congregation have occasion to go in company together to a place of public worship, and they should join together in singing praises to God, as they go, I confess, that after long consideration—and endeavouring to view the thing every way with the utmost diligence and impartiality I am capable of—I cannot find any valid objection against it. As to the common objection from Matt. vi. 5. “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men;” it is strong against a single person singing in the streets, or in the meeting-house by himself, as offering to God personal worship. But as it is brought against a considerable company, their thus publicly worshipping God, appears to me to have no weight at all; it is of no more force against a company’s thus praising God in the streets, than against their praising him in the synagogues, or meeting-houses; for the streets and the synagogues are both put together in these words of our Saviour, as parallel in the case. It is evident that Christ speaks of personal, and not public worship. If to sing in the streets be ostentatious, then it must be because it is a public place, and it cannot be done there without being very open; but it is no more public than the synagogue or meeting-house is when full of people. Some worship is in its nature private, as that which is proper to particular persons, or families, or private societies, and has respect to their particular concerns; but that which I now speak of, is performed under no other notion than a part of God’s public worship, without any relation to any private, separate society, and in which every visible Christian has equal liberty to join, if it be convenient for him, and he has a disposition, as in the worship that is performed in the meeting-house.

When persons are going to the house of public worship, to serve God there with the assembly of his people, they are upon no other design than that of putting public honour upon God; that is the business they go from home upon; and, even in their walking the streets on this errand, they appear in a public act of respect to God; and therefore, if they go in company with public praise, it is not being public when they ought to be private. It is one part of the beauty of public worship, that it be very *public*; the more public it is, the more open honour it puts upon God; and especially is it beautiful in *public praise*; for the very notion of publicly praising God, is to declare abroad his glory, to publish his praise, to make it known, and proclaim it aloud, as is evident by innumerable expressions of Scripture. It is fit that God’s honour should not be concealed, but made known in the great congregation, and proclaimed before the sun, and upon the house-tops, before kings and all nations, and that his praises should be heard to the utmost ends of the earth.

I suppose none will condemn singing God's praises, merely because it is performed in the open air; and, if it may be performed by a company in the open air, doubtless they may do it moving, as well as standing still. So the children of *Israel* praised God, when they went to mount *Zion* with the ark of God; and the multitude praised Christ, when they entered with him into *Jerusalem*, a little before his passion. The children of Israel were wont, from year to year, to go up to *Jerusalem* in companies, from all parts of the land, three times in the year, when they often used to manifest the engagedness of their minds by travelling all night, and manifested their joy and gladness by singing praises with great decency and beauty, as they went towards God's holy mountain; as is evident by Isa. xxx. 29. "Ye shall have a song as in the night, when a holy solemnity is kept, and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty One of Israel." And Ps. xlii. 4. "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me; for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God; with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy-day." Ps. c. 4. "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise." When God's people are going to his house, the occasion is so joyful to a Christian in a lively frame, (the language of whose heart is, *Come let us go up to the house of the Lord*, and who is glad when it is said to him) that the duty of singing praises seems to be peculiarly beautiful on such an occasion. So that if the state of the country were ripe for it, and there should be frequent occasions for a considerable part of a congregation to go together to the places of public worship, and there was in other respects a proportionable appearance of fervency of devotion, it appears to me that it would be ravishingly beautiful, if such things were practised all over the land, and would have a great tendency to enliven, animate, and rejoice the souls of God's saints, and greatly to propagate vital religion. I believe the time is coming when the world will be full of such things.

3. It seems to me to be requisite that there should be the consent of the governing part of the worshipping societies, to which persons have joined themselves, and of which they own themselves a part, in order to the introducing of things in public worship, so new and uncommon, and not essential, nor particularly commanded, into the places where those worshipping societies belong. The peace and union of such societies seems to require it. They have voluntarily united themselves to these worshipping societies, to the end that they might be one in the God's public worship, and have obliged themselves in covenant to act as brethren, mutual assistants, and members of one body in those affairs. All are hereby naturally and necessarily led to be concerned with one another, in matters of religion and God's worship; and this is a part of the public worship, that must be performed from time to time in the view of the whole, being performed at a time when they are meeting

together for mutual assistance in worship, and therefore that which all must unavoidably be in some measure concerned in, at least so as to show their approbation and consent, or open dislike and separation from them in it. Hence charity, and a regard to the union and peace of such societies, seems to require a consent of the governing part, in order to the introducing any thing of this nature. Certainly if we are of the spirit of the apostle *Paul*, and have his discretion, we shall not set up any such practice without it. He, for the sake of peace, conformed in things wherein he was not particularly forbidden, to the *Jews* when among them; and so, when among those that were without the law, he conformed to them wherein he might.—To be sure, those go much beyond proper limits, who, coming from abroad, do immediately of their own heads, in a strange place, set up such a new and uncommon practice among a people.

In introducing any thing of this nature among a people, their minister especially ought to be consulted, and his voice taken, as long as he is owned for their minister. Ministers are pastors of worshipping societies, and their heads and guides in the affairs of public worship. They are called in Scripture, *those that rule over them*; and their people are commanded Heb. xiii. 17. *to obey them, because they watch for their souls, as those that must give account*. If it belongs to these shepherds and rulers to direct and guide the flock in any thing at all, it belongs to them so to do in the circumstantial of their public worship.

Thus I have taken particular notice of many of those things that have appeared to me to be amiss in the management of our religious concerns relating to the present revival of religion, and have taken liberty freely to express my thoughts upon them. Upon the whole it appears manifest to me, that things have as yet never been set a-going in their right channel; if they had, and means had been blessed in proportion as they have been now, this work would have so prevailed, as before this time to have carried all before it, and have triumphed over New England as its conquest.

The devil, in driving things to these extremes, besides the present hindrance of the work of God, has, I believe, had in view a twofold mischief, in the issue of things; one, with respect to those that are cold in religion, to carry things to such an extreme in order that people in general, having their eyes opened by the great excess, might be tempted entirely to reject the whole work, as being all nothing but delusion and distraction. And another, with respect to those of God's children who have been very warm and zealous out of the way, to sink them down in unbelief and darkness. The time is coming, I doubt not, when the greater part of them will be convinced of their errors; and then probably the devil will take advantage to lead them into a dreadful wilderness, to puzzle and confound them about their own experiences, and the experiences of others; and to make them to doubt of many things that

they ought not, and even to tempt them with atheistical thoughts. I believe, if all true Christians over the land should now at once have their eyes opened fully to see all their errors, it would seem for the present to damp religion. The dark thoughts that it would at first occasion, and the inward doubts, difficulties, and conflicts that would rise in their souls, would deaden their lively affections and joys, and would cause an appearance of a present decay of religion. But yet it would do God's saints great good in their latter end; it would fit them for more spiritual and excellent experiences, more humble and heavenly love, and unmixed joys, and would greatly tend to a more powerful, extensive, and durable prevalence of vital piety.

I do not know but we shall be in danger, after our eyes are fully opened to see our errors, to go to contrary extremes. The devil has driven the *pendulum* far beyond its proper point of rest; and when he has carried it to the utmost length that he can, and it begins by its own weight to swing back, he probably will set in, and drive it with the utmost fury the other way; and so give us no rest; and if possible prevent our settling in a proper medium. What a poor, blind, weak, and miserable creature is man, at his best estate! We are like poor helpless sheep; the devil is too subtle for us. What is our strength! What is our wisdom! How ready are we to go astray! How easily are we drawn aside into innumerable snares, while in the mean time we are bold and confident, and doubt not but we are right and safe! We are foolish sheep in the midst of subtle serpents and cruel wolves, and do not know it. Oh how unfit are we to be left to ourselves! And how much do we stand in need of the wisdom, the power, the condescension, patience, forgiveness, and gentleness of our good Shepherd!

---