

## **The Glory of Christ, part 2**

**John Owen**

Meditations And Discourses Concerning The Glory Of Christ;

Applied Unto Unconverted Sinners And Saints Under Spiritual Decays.

In Two Chapters, From John 17:24.

Original Preface.

To The Reader.

The design of this preface is not to commend either the author or the matter contained in this little book. Let every reader do as he finds cause. Nor need any assurance be given that Dr Owen was the author, to any who have conversed with his writings, and will be at the pains to read this over. It is, indeed, his application of the former Discourses upon this subject, printed in the year 1684. But the reason why it was not then added (the omission whereof rendered that book imperfect to judicious readers) seems necessary to be given. Had it pleased God he had lived a little longer, it would have come out as perfect as his other works. But there being no more transcribed in his lifetime than what was then printed, and that published soon after his death, these two chapters, wrote only with his own hand, were found too late to be then added. They are therefore now printed to complete those Discourses. And it is presumed, that as no serious Christian who reads this will be satisfied without the other also, so all who prize the former will be glad of the opportunity to add this thereunto. \*

\* The Discourses that follow were first printed in 1691, eight years after the death of Dr Owen. This circumstance may explain the absence of the Italics, of which he generally made free use in all his publications. - Ed.

## Part II.

### Meditations and Discourses concerning the Glory of Christ.

#### Chapter 1.

Application of the foregoing meditations concerning the Glory of Christ: First, in an Exhortation unto such as are not yet Partakers of Him.

That which remains is, to make some application of the glorious truth insisted on unto the souls of them that are concerned; and what I have to offer unto that end I shall distribute under two heads. The first shall be with respect unto them who are yet strangers from this holy and glorious One, - who are not yet made partakers of him, nor have any especial interest in him. And the second shall be directed unto believers, as a guide and assistance unto their recovery from spiritual decays, and the revival of a spring of vigorous grace, holiness, and obedience in them.

For the first of these, although it seems not directly to lie in our way, yet is it suited unto the method of the Gospel, that wherever there is a declaration of the excellencies of Christ, in his person, grace, or office, it should be accompanied with an invitation and exhortation unto sinners to come unto him. This method he himself first made use of, Matt. 11: 27-30; John 7: 37, 38, and consecrated it unto our use also. Besides, it is necessary from the nature of the things themselves; for who can dwell on the consideration of the glory of Christ, being called therewith to the declaration of it, but his own mind will engage him to invite lost sinners unto a participation of him? But I shall at present proceed no farther in this exhortation, but only unto the proposal of some of those considerations which may prepare, incline, and dispose their minds unto a closure with him as he is tendered in the Gospels As, -

1. Let them consider well what is their present state with respect unto God and eternity. This Moses wisheth for the Israelites, Deut. 32: 29, "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" It is the greatest folly in the world to leave the issues of these things unto an uncertain hazard; and that man who cannot prevail with himself strictly to examine what is his state and condition with respect unto eternity, does never do any good nor abstain from any evil in a due manner. Remember, therefore, that "many are called, but few are chosen." To be called, is to enjoy all the outward privileges of the Gospel, - which is all you unto whom I speak can pretend unto; yet this you may do and not be chosen; - even among those unto whom the word is preached, they are but few that shall be saved. In the distribution made by our Lord Jesus Christ of the hearers of the word into four sorts of ground, it was but one of them that received real benefit thereby; and if our congregations are no better than were his hearers, there is not above a fourth part of them that will be saved, - it may be a far less number; - and is it not strange that every one of them is not jealous over himself and his own condition? Many herein deceive themselves until they fall under woeful surprisals. And this is represented in the account of the final judgement; for the generality of those who have professed the Gospel are introduced as complaining of their disappointments, Matt. 25: 41-44 [10-12?]. For what is there spoken is only a declaration of what befell them here in the close of their lives, and their personal judgement thereon.

2. Take heed of being deluded by common presumptions. Most men have some thoughts in general about what their state is, and what it will be in the issue; but they make no diligent search into this matter, because a number of common presumptions do immediately insinuate themselves into their minds for their relief; and they are such as all whose force and efficacy unto this end lies in this, that they differ from others, and are better than they; - as that they are Christians, that they are in the right way of religion, that they are partakers of the outward privileges of the Gospel, hearing the word, and participating of the sacraments; - that they have light and

convictions, so as that they abstain from sin, and perform duties so as others do not; and the like. All those with whom it is not so, who are behind them in these things, they judge to be in an ill state and condition, whence they entertain good hopes concerning themselves; and this is all that most trust unto. It is not my present business to discourse the vanity of presumptions; - it has been done by many. I give only this warning in general, unto those who have the least design or purpose to come to Christ, and to be made partakers of him, that they put no trust in them, that they rely not on them; for if they do so they will eternally deceive their souls. This was a great part of the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist, Matt. 3: 9, "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father." This was their great comprehensive privilege, containing all the outward church and covenant advantages. These they rested in and trusted to unto their ruin; herein he designed to undeceive them.

3. consider aright what it is to live and die without an interest in Christ, without a participation of him. Where this is not stated in the mind, where thoughts of it are not continually prevalent, there can be no one step taken in the way towards him. Unless we are thoroughly convinced that without him we are in a state of apostasy from God, under the curse, obnoxious unto eternal wrath, as some of the worst of God's enemies, we shall never flee unto him for refuge in a due manner. "The whole have no need of a physician, but the sick." Christ "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance;" and the conviction intended is the principal end of the ministry of the law. The miseries of this state have been the subject of innumerable sermons and discourses; but there is a general misery in the whole, that few take themselves to be concerned therein, or apply these things unto themselves. Let us tell men of it a thousand times, yet they either take no notice of it, or believe it not, or look on it as that which belongs unto the way and course of preaching, wherein they are not concerned. These things, it seems, preachers must say; and they may believe them who have a mind whereunto. It is a rare thing that any one shall as much as say unto himself, Is it so with me? And if we now, together with this caution, tell the same men again, that whilst they are uninterested in Christ, not ingrafted into him by faith, that they run in vain, that all their labour in religion is lost, that their duties are all rejected, that they are under the displeasure and curse of God, that their end is eternal destruction, - which are all unquestionably certain, - yet will they let all these things pass by without any farther consideration.

But here I must fix with them unto whom I speak at present, - unless there be a full conviction in them of the woeful, deplorable condition of every soul, of whatever quality, profession, religion, outward state it be, who is not yet made partaker of Christ, all that I have farther to add will be of no signification. Remember, then, that the due consideration hereof is unto you, in your state, your chiefest concernment in this world: and be not afraid to take in a full and deep sense of it; for if you are really delivered from it, and have good evidence thereof, it is nothing unto you but matter of eternal praise and thanksgiving. And if you are not so, it is highly necessary that your minds should be possessed with due apprehension of it. The work of this conviction is the first effect of true religion; and the great abuse of religion in the world is, that a pretence of it deludes the minds of men to apprehend that it is not necessary: for to be of this or that religion, - of this or that way in religion, - is supposed sufficient to secure the eternal state of men, though they are never convinced of their lost estate by nature.

Consider therefore, his infinite condescension, grace, and love herein. Why all this towards you? Does he stand in need of you? Have you deserved it at his hands? Did you love him first? Cannot he be happy and blessed without you? Has he any design upon you, that he is so earnest in calling you unto him? Alas! it is nothing but the overflowing of mercy, compassion, and grace, that moves and acts him herein. Here lies the entrance of innumerable souls into a death and condemnation far more severe than those contained in the curse of the law, 2 Cor. 2: 15, 16. In the contempt of this infinite condescension of Christ in his holy invitation of sinners to himself, lies the sting and poison of unbelief, which unavoidably gives over the souls of men unto eternal ruin. And who shall once pity them to eternity who are guilty of it? Yea, but, -

5. Perhaps, if you should, on his invitation, begin to look to Him, and resolve to come to him, you are greatly afraid that when it comes to the trial he will not receive you; for no heart can conceive, no tongue can express, what wretched, vile, and provoking sinners you have been. That the Lord Christ will receive unto him such as we are, we have no hopes, or that ever we shall find acceptance with him. I say it is not amiss when persons come so far as to be sensible of what discouragements they have to conflict withal, what difficulties lie in their way, and what objections do arise against them; for the most do perish in a senseless stupidity, - they will not consider how it is with them, what is required of them, nor how it will be in the latter end; - they doubt not but that either they do believe already, or can do so when they please. But when any come so far as to charge the failure of their acceptance with Christ on their own unworthiness, and so are discouraged from coming unto him, there are arguments for their conviction and persuasion, which nothing but the devil and unbelief can defeat. Wherefore, that which is now proposed unto consideration in answer hereunto, is the readiness of Christ to receive every sinner, be he who or what he will, that shall come unto him. And hereof we have the highest evidences that divine wisdom and grace can give unto us. This is the language of the Gospel, of all that the Lord Christ did or suffered, which is recorded therein; - this is the divine testimony of the "three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost;" and of the "three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, the water, and the blood:" all give their joint testimony, that the Lord Christ is ready to receive all sinners that come to him. They who receive not this testimony make God a liar, - both Father, Son, and Spirit. Whatever the Lord Christ is in the constitution of his person, - in the representation of the Father, - in his office, - in what he did on the earth, - in what he does in heaven, - proclaims the same truth. Nothing but cursed obstinacy in sin and unbelief can suggest a thought unto our minds that he is not willing to receive us when we come unto him. Herein we are to bear testimony against the unbelief of all unto whom the gospel is preached, that come not unto him. Unbelief acting itself herein, includes a contempt of the wisdom of God, a denial of his truth or faithfulness, an impeachment of the sincerity of Christ in his invitations, making him a deceiver, and will issue in an express hatred of his person and office, and of the wisdom of God in him. Here, then, you are shut up, - you cannot from hence take any countenance unto your unbelief

6. Consider that he is as able to save us as he is ready and willing to receive us. The testimonies which he has given us unto his goodness and love are uncontrollable; and none dare directly to call in question or deny his power. Generally, this is taken for granted by all, that Christ is able to save us if he will; yea, who shall question his ability to save us, though we live in sin and unbelief? And many expect that he will do so, because they believe he can if he will. But indeed Christ has no such power, no such ability: he cannot save unbelieving, impenitent sinners; for this cannot be done without denying himself, acting contrary to his word, and destroying his own glory. Let none please themselves with such vain imaginations. Christ is able to save all them, and only them, who come to God by him. Whilst you live in sin and unbelief, Christ himself cannot save you; but when it comes to the trial in particular, some are apt to think, that although they will not conclude that Christ cannot save them, yet they do, on various accounts, that they cannot be saved by him. This, therefore, we also give testimony unto in our exhortation to come unto him, - namely, that his power to save those that shall comply with his call is sovereign, uncontrollable, almighty, that nothing can stand in the way of. All things in heaven and earth are committed unto him; - all power is his; - and he will use it unto this end, - namely, the assured salvation of all that come unto him.

7. Consider greatly what has been spoken of the representation of God, and all the holy properties of his nature, in him. Nothing can possibly give us more encouragement to come unto him; for we have manifested that God, who is infinitely wise and glorious, has designed to exert all the holy properties of his nature - his mercy, love, grace, goodness, righteousness, wisdom, and power - in him, in and unto the salvation of them that do believe. Whoever, therefore, comes unto Christ by faith on this representation of the glory of God in him, he ascribes and gives unto

God all that glory and honour which he aimeth at from his creatures; and we can do nothing wherewith he is pleased equal unto it. Every poor soul that comes by faith unto Christ, gives unto God all that glory which it is his design to manifest and be exalted in; - and what can we do more? There is more glory given unto God by coming unto Christ in believing, than in keeping the whole law; inasmuch as he hath more eminently manifested the holy properties of his nature in the way of salvation by Christ, than in giving of the law. There is therefore no man who, under gospel invitations, refuseth to come unto and close with Christ by believing, but secretly, through the power of darkness, blindness, and unbelief, he hates God, dislikes all his ways, would not have his glory exalted or manifested, choosing rather to die in enmity against him than to give glory to him. Do not deceive yourselves; it is not an indifferent thing, whether you will come in unto Christ upon his invitations or no, - a thing that you may put off from one season unto another: your present refusal of it is as high an act of enmity against God as your nature is capable of.

8. Consider that by coming unto Christ you shall have an interest in all that glory which we have proposed unto you; for Christ will become yours more intimately than your wives and children are yours; and so all his glory is yours also. All are apt to be affected with the good things of their relations, - their grace, their riches, their beauty, their power; for they judge themselves to have an interest in them, by reason of their relation unto them. Christ is nearer to believers than any natural relations are to us whatever; they have therefore an interest in all his glory. And is this a small thing in your eyes, that Christ shall be yours, and all his glory shall be yours, and you shall have the advantage of it unto your eternal blessedness? Is it nothing unto you to continue strangers from, and uninterested in, all this glory? to be left to take your portion in this world, in lusts, and sins, and pleasures, and a few perishing trifles, with eternal ruin in the close, whilst such durable substance, such riches of glory, are tendered unto you?

Lastly, consider the horrible ingratitude there is in a neglect or refusal to come in to Christ upon his invitation, with the doleful, eternal ruin that will ensue thereon. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Impenitent unbelievers under the preaching of the gospel, are the vilest and most ungrateful of all God's creation. The devils themselves, as wicked as they are, are not guilty of this sin; for Christ is never tendered unto them, - they never had an offer of salvation on faith and repentance. This is their peculiar sin, and will be the peculiar aggravation of their misery unto eternity. "Hear, ye despisers, wonder, and perish". The sin of the devil is in malice and opposition unto knowledge, above what the nature of man is in this world. Men, therefore, must sin in some instance above the devil, or God would not give them their eternal portion with the devil and his angels: - this is unbelief.

Some, it may be, will say, What then shall we do? what shall we apply ourselves unto? what is it that is required of us?

1. Take the advice of the apostle, Heb. 3: 7, 8, 13, "Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." This day, even this, is unto you in the tender of grace the acceptable time; - this is the day of salvation. Others have had this day as well as you, and have missed their opportunity; - take heed lest it should be so with you also. Now if any one should write it down, or peculiarly commit it to remembrance, "This day there was a tender of Christ and salvation in him made unto my soul, - from this time I will resolve to give up myself unto him," and if you form your resolutions, charge your consciences with what you have engaged, and make yourselves to know that if you go back from it, it is a token that you are going to ruin.

2. Consider that it is high time for you to make somewhat of religion. Do not hang always in suspense; let it not be a question with yourselves, whether you have a mind to be saved or no. This is as good a time and season for a resolution as ever you are like to have whilst in this world. Some things, nay, many things, may fall in between this and the next opportunity, that shall put you backward, and make your entrance into the kingdom of heaven far more difficult than ever it

was; and the living in that uncertainty at best, which you do, of what will become of you unto eternity, is the most miserable kind of life in the world. Those who put far from them the evil day, and live in the pursuit of lusts and pleasures, have somewhat that gives them present satisfaction, and they say not, "There is no hope," because they "find the life of the hand" [Isa. 57: 10]; but you have nothing that gives you any prevalent refreshment, neither will your latter end be better than theirs, if you die without an interest in Christ Jesus. Come, therefore, at length, unto a determinate resolution what you will do in this matter. Christ has waited long for you, and who knows how soon he may withdraw, never to look after you any more?

Upon occasion of the preceding Discourse concerning the Glory of Christ, I thought it necessary to add unto it this brief exhortation unto faith in him, aiming to suit it unto the capacity of the meanest sinner that is capable of any self-consideration as unto his eternal welfare. But yet, a little farther to give efficacy unto this exhortation, it will be necessary to remove some of those common and obvious tergiversations that convinced sinners do usually retake themselves unto, to put off a present compliance with the calls of Christ to come unto him; for although it is unbelief alone, acting in the darkness of men's minds and the obstinacy of their wills, that effectually keeps off sinners from coming unto Christ upon his call, yet it shrouds itself under various pretences, that it may not appear in its own ugly form. For no sin whereof men can be guilty in this world is of so horrible a nature, and so dreadful an aspect, as is this unbelief, where a clear view of it is obtained in evangelical light. Wherefore, by the aid of Satan, it suggests other pleas and pretences unto the minds of sinners, under which they may countenance themselves in a refusal to come to Christ. See 2 Cor. 4: 4. Any thing else it shall be, but not unbelief; - that they all disavow. I shall therefore speak unto a few of those tergiversations in this case which are obvious, and which are exemplified in the Gospel itself.

First, Some do say, on such exhortations, What is it that you would have us to do? - We hear the word preached, we believe it as well as we can, we do many things willingly, and abstain from many evils diligently; what is more required of us? This is the language of the hearts of the most with whom in this case we have to do. And I say, -

1. It is usual with them who do something in the ways of God, but not all they should, and so nothing in a due manner, to expostulate about requiring of them more than they do. So the people dispute with God himself, Mal. 1: 6, 3: 8, 13. So they in the Gospel who esteemed themselves to have done their duty, being pressed unto faith by Christ Jesus, ask him with some indignation, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" John 6: 28. If what we do be not enough, what is it that you require more of us? So was it with the young man, Matt. 19: 20, "What lack I yet?" Be advised, therefore, not to be too confident of your state, lest you should yet lack that one thing, the want whereof might prove your eternal ruin.

2. The things mentioned, with all of the like nature, which may be multiplied, may be where there is no one spark of saving faith. Simon Magus heard the word, and believed as well as he could; - Herod heard it, and did many things gladly; - and all sorts of hypocrites do upon their convictions perform many duties, and abstain from many sins: so as that, notwithstanding this plea, you may perish for ever.

3. Where these things are sincere, they belong unto the exercise of faith; they may be after a sort without faith, but faith cannot be without them. But there is a fundamental act of faith, whereby we close with Christ, whereby we receive him, that is, in order of nature, antecedent unto its acting in all other duties and occasions; - it is laying the foundation; other things belong to the building. This is that you are called on to secure; and you may know it by these two properties: -

1. It is singular. So our Saviour tells the Jews, John 6: 29, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he has sent." The act, work, or duty of faith, in the receiving of Christ, is a peculiar, singular work, wherein the soul yields especial obedience unto God; - it is not to be reckoned unto such common duties as those mentioned, but the soul must find out wherein it has in a singular manner closed with Christ upon the command of God.

2. It is accompanied with a universal spiritual change in the whole soul, 2 Cor. 5: 17, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Wherefore, if you would not choose rather to deceive and ruin your own souls, come to the trial whether indeed you have received Christ in such a singular, transforming act of faith: do not on such pretences want a compliance with the word of exhortation proposed unto you. But, -

Secondly, Some will say, they know not how to proceed in this work. They can make nothing of it; they have tried to come to this believing, but do still fail in what they design; they go on and off, but can make no progress, can come to no satisfaction; therefore they think it best to let things go in general as they are, without putting themselves to farther trouble, as unto any especial act of faith in the receiving of Christ. This is the language of men's hearts, though not of their mouths, another shelter of unbelief, - and they act accordingly; they have a secret despondency, which keeps them safe from attempting a real closure with Christ on the tender of the Gospel. Something may be offered unto this distempered frame of mind.

1. Remember the disciples that were fishing, and had toiled all night, but caught nothing, Luke 5: 3, 4. Upon the coming of Christ unto them, he requires that they should cast out their nets once more; Peter makes some excuse, from the labour which they had taken in vain all night; however, he would venture once more, on the command of Christ, and had an astonishing draught of fishes, verses 5-9. Have you been wearied with disappointments in your attempts and resolutions? Yet cast in your net this once more, upon the command of Christ, - venture this once more to come unto him on his call and invitation; you know not what success he may give unto you.

2. Consider that it is not failing in this or that attempt of coming to Christ, but a giving over your endeavours, that will be your ruin. The woman of Canaan, in her great outcry to Christ for mercy, Matt. 15: 22, had many a repulse. First, it is said, he answered her not a word; then his disciples desired that he would send her away, that she might not trouble him any more; whereon he gives a reason why he would not regard her, or why he could justly pass her by; she was not an Israelitess, unto whom he was sent; - yet she gives not over, but pressing into his presence, cries out for mercy, verse 25. Being come to that issue, to try and draw out her faith to the utmost, which was his design from the beginning, he reckons her among dogs, that were not to have children's bread given unto them. Had she now at last given over upon this severe rebuke, she had never obtained mercy; but persisting in her request, she at last prevailed, verses 27, 28. It may be you have prayed, and cried, and resolved, and vowed, but all without success, as you suppose; sin has broken through all: however, if you give not over, you shall prevail at last; you know not at what time God will come in with his grace, and Christ will manifest his love unto you as unto the poor woman, after many a rebuke. It may be, after all, he will do it this day; and if not, he may do it another: do not despond. Take that word of Christ himself for your encouragement, Prov. 8: 34, "Blessed is the man that hearth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." If you hear him, and wait, though you have not yet admission, but are kept at the gates and posts of the doors, yet in the issue you shall be blessed.

3. The rule in this case is, Hos. 6: 3, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know." Are you in the way of knowing Christ in the use of means, hearing the word, and sincere endeavours in holy duties? Though you cannot yet attain unto any evidence that you have received him, have closed with him, nothing can ruin you but giving over the way wherein you are; for then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord. Many can give you their experiences, that if they had been discouraged by present overwhelming difficulties, arising from their disappointments, breaking of vows, relapses into folly, they had been utterly ruined; whereas now they are at rest and peace in the bosom of Christ. On a great surprisal, Christ lost at once many disciples, and they lost their souls, John 6: 66, "They went back, and walked no more with him." Take heed of the like discouragements.

Thirdly, Some may say, yea, practically they do say, that these things indeed are necessary; they must come to Christ by believing, or they are undone; but this is not the season of it, - there will be time enough to apply themselves unto it when other occasions are past. At present they

have not leisure to enter upon and go through with this duty; wherefore they will abide in their present state for a while, hearing and doing many things, and when time serves, will apply themselves unto this duty also.

1. This is an uncontrollable evidence of that sottishness and folly which is come upon our nature by sin, - a depravation that the apostle places in the head of the evils of corrupted nature, Tit. 3: 1-3. Can any thing be more foolish, sottish, and stupid, than for men to put off the consideration of the eternal concernment of their souls for one hour, being altogether uncertain whether they shall live another or n? - to prefer present triodes before the blessedness or misery of an immortal state? For those who never heard of these things, who never had any conviction of sin and judgement, to put the evil day far from them, is not much to be admired; but for you who have Christ preached unto you, who own a necessity of coming unto him, to put it off from day to day upon such slight pretences, - it is an astonishing folly! May you not be spoken unto in the language of the Wisdom of God, Prov. 6: 9-11. You come to hear the word, and when you go away, the language of your hearts is, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep;" we will abide a little while in our present state, and afterward we will rouse up ourselves. Under this deceit do multitudes perish every day. This is a dark shade, wherein cursed unbelief lies hid.

2. Consider that this is the greatest engine that Satan makes use of in the world among them that hear the word preached unto them, for the ruin of their souls. He has other arts, and ways, and methods of dealing with other men, - as by sensual and worldly lusts; but as unto them who, through their convictions, do attend unto the preaching of the word, this is his great and almost only engine for their ruin: There needs no haste in this matter, - another time will be more seasonable, - you may be sure not to fail of it before you die; however, this present day and time is most unfit for it, - you have other things to do, - you cannot part with your present frame, - you may come again to hear the word the next opportunity. Know assuredly, if your minds are influenced unto delays of coming to Christ by such insinuations, you are under the power of Satan, and he is like enough to hold you fast unto destruction.

3. This is as evil and dangerous a posture or frame of mind as you can well fall under. If you have learned to put off God, and Christ, and the word for the present season, and yet relieve yourselves in this, that you do not intend, like others, always to reject them, but will have a time to hearken to their calls, you are secured and fortified against all convictions and persuasions, all fears; one answer will serve for all, - within a little while you will do all that can be required of you. This is that which ruins the souls of multitudes every day. It is better dealing with men openly profligate, than with such a trifling promiser. See Isa. 5: 7, 10.

4. Remember that the Scripture confines you unto the present day, without the least intimation that you shall have either another day, or another tender of grace and mercy in any day, 2 Cor. 6: 2; Heb. 3: 7, 13; 12: 15. Take care lest you come short of the grace of God, miss of it by missing your opportunity. Redeem the time, or you are lost for ever.

5. As unto the pretence of your occasions and business, there is a ready way to disappoint the craft of Satan in that pretence, - namely, to mix thoughts of Christ and the renovation of your resolutions either to come or to cleave unto him with all your occasions. Let nothing put it utterly out of your minds; make it familiar unto you, and you will beat Satan out of that stronghold, Prov. 7: 4. However, shake yourselves out of this dust, or destruction lies at the door.

Fourthly, It is the language of the hearts of some, that if they give up themselves unto a compliance with this exhortation, and go seriously about this duty, they must relinquish and renounce all their lusts and pleasures; yea, much of their converse and society, wherein they find so much present satisfaction, as that they know not how to part with them. If they might retain their old ways, at least some of them, it were another matter; but this total relinquishment of all is very severe.

Ans. 1. The Jesuits, preaching and painting of Christ among some of the Indians, concealed from them his cross and sufferings, telling them only of his present glory and power; so as they

pretended to win them over to faith in him, hiding from them that whereby they might be discouraged; and so preached a false Christ unto them, one of their own framing. We dare do no such thing for all the world; we can here use no condescension, no compliance, no composition with respect unto any sin or lust; we have no commission to grant that request of Lot, "Is it not a little one? let it be spared;" nor to come to Naaman's terms, "God be merciful to me in this thing; in all others I will be obedient." Wherefore, -

2. We must here be peremptory with you, whatever be the event; if you are discouraged by it, we cannot help it. Cursed be the man that shall encourage you to come to Christ with hopes of indulgence unto any one sin whatever. I speak not this as though you could at once absolutely and perfectly leave all sin, in the root and branches of it; but only you are to do it in heart and resolution, engaging unto a universal mortification of all sin, as by grace from above you shall be enabled; but your choice must be absolute, without reserves, as to love, interest, and design; - God or the world, - Christ or Belial, - holiness or sin; there is no medium, no terms of composition, 2 Cor. 6: 15-18.

As unto what you pretend of your pleasures, the truth is, you never yet had any real pleasure, nor do know what it is. How easy were it to declare the folly, vanity, bitterness, poison of those things which you have esteemed your pleasures! Here alone - namely, in Christ, and a participation of him - are true pleasures and durable riches to be obtained; pleasure of the same nature with, and such as, like pleasant streams, flow down into the ocean of eternal pleasures above. A few moments in these joys are to be preferred above the longest continuance in the cursed pleasures of this world. See Prov. 3: 13-18.

Fifthly, It will be said by some, that they do not see those who profess themselves to be believers, to be so much better than they are, as that you need to press us so earnestly to so great a change; we know not why we should not be accounted believers already, as well as they. I shall in a few words, as well as I am able, lay this stumbling-block out of the way, though I confess, at this day, it is weighty and cumbersome. And I say, -

1. Among them that profess themselves to be believers, there are many false, corrupt hypocrites; and it is no wonder that on various occasions they lay the stumbling-block of their iniquities before the faces of others; but they shall bear their own burden and judgement.

2. It is acknowledged, it must be bewailed, that some whom we have reason to judge to be true believers, yet, through their unfortified pride, or covetousness, or carelessness in their conversation, or vain attire and conformity to the world, or forwardness, do give just occasion of offence. We confess that God is displeased herewith, Christ and the Gospel dishonoured, and many that are weak are wounded, and others discouraged. But as for you, this is not your rule, - this is not proposed unto you; but that word only is so that will never fail you.

3. The world does not know, nor is able to make a right judgement of believers; nor do you so, for it is the spiritual man alone that discerneth the things of God. Their infirmities are visible to all, - their graces invisible; the King's daughter is glorious within. And when you are able to make a right judgement of them, you will desire no greater advancement than to be of their society, Ps. 16: 3.

These few instances of the pretences wherewith unbelief covers its deformity, and hides that destruction wherewith it is accompanied, may suffice unto our present purpose; they are multiplied in the minds of men, impregnated by the suggestions of Satan on their darkness and folly. A little spiritual wisdom will rend the veil of them all, and expose unbelief acting in enmity against Christ under them. But what has been spoken may suffice to answer the necessity of the preceding exhortation on this occasion.

Chapter 2.

## The Way and Means of the Recovery of Spiritual Decays, and of Obtaining Fresh Springs of Grace.

The application of the same truth, in the second place, belongs unto relievers, especially such as have made any long profession of walking in the ways of God and the gospel. And that which I design herein, is to manifest, that a steady spiritual view of the glory of Christ by faith, will give them a gracious revival from inward decays, and fresh springs of grace, even in their latter days. A truth this is, as we shall see, confirmed by Scripture, with the joyful experience of multitudes of believers, and is of great importance unto all that are so.

There are two things which those who, after a long profession of the gospel, are entering into the confines of eternity do long for and desire. The one is, that all their breaches may be repaired, their decays recovered, their backsliding healed; for unto these things they have been less or more obnoxious in the course of their walking before God. The other is, that they may have fresh springs of spiritual life, and vigorous acting of all divine graces, in spiritual-mindedness, holiness, and fruitfulness, unto the praise of God, the honour of the gospel, and the increase of their own peace and joy. These things they value more than all the world, and all that is in it; about these things are their thoughts and contrivances exercised night and day. Those with whom it is otherwise, whatever they pretend, are in the dark unto themselves and their own condition; for it is in the nature of this grace to grow and increase unto the end. As rivers, the nearer they come unto the ocean whither they tend, the more they increase their waters, and speed their streams; so will grace flow more freely and fully in its near approaches to the ocean of glory. That is not saving which does not so.

An experience hereof - I mean of the thriving of grace towards the end of our course - is that alone which can support us under the troubles and temptations of life, which we have to conflict withal. So the apostle tells us, that this is our great relief in all our distresses and afflictions, "for which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day," 2 Cor. 4: 16. If it be so, that in the daily decays of the outward man, in all the approaches of its dissolution, we have inward spiritual revivals and renovation, we shall not faint in what we undergo. And without such continual renovations, we shall faint in our distresses, whatever other things we may have, or whatever we pretend unto the contrary.

And ordinarily it is so, in the holy, wise providence of God, that afflictions and troubles increase with age. It is so, in an especial manner, with ministers of the gospel; they have many of them a share in the lot of Peter, which our Lord Jesus Christ declared unto him, John 21: 18, "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." Besides those natural distemper and infirmities which accompany the decays of life, troubles of life, and in their affairs, do usually grow upon them, when they look for nothing less, but were ready to say with Job, "We shall die in our nest," Job 29: 18. So was it with Jacob, after all his hard labour and travail to provide for his family, such things fell out in it in his old age as had almost broken his heart. And oft times both persecutions and public dangers do befall them at the same season. Whilst the outward man is thus perishing, we need great supportment, that we faint not. And this is only to be had in an experience of daily spiritual renovations in the inner man.

The excellency of this mercy the Psalmist expresseth in a heavenly manner, Ps. 92: 12-15, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to show that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."

The promise in the 12th verse respects the times of the Messiah, or of the New Testament; for so it is prophesied of him, "In his days the righteous shall flourish," Ps. 72: 7, - namely, through

the abundance of grace that should be administered from his fulness, as John 1: 16; Col. 1: 19. And herein consists the glory of the gospel, and not in outward prosperity or external ornaments of divine worship. The flourishing of the righteous, I say, in grace and holiness is the glory of the office of Christ and of the gospel. Where this is not, there is no glory in the profession of our religion. The glory of kings is in the wealth and peace of their subjects; and the glory of Christ is in the grace and holiness of his subjects.

This flourishing is compared to the palm-tree, and the growth of the cedar. The palm-tree is of the greatest verdure, beauty, and fruitfulness, and the cedar of the greatest and longest growth of any trees. So are the righteous compared to the palm-tree for the beauty of profession and fruitfulness in obedience; and unto the cedar for a continual, constant growth and increase in grace. Thus it is with all that are righteous, unless it be from their own sinful neglect, as it is with many in this day. They are hereon rather like the shrubs and heaths in the wilderness, which see not when good comes, than like the palm-tree or the cedars of Lebanon. And hereby do men what lies in them to obscure the glory of Christ and his kingdom, as well as disquiet their own souls.

The words that follow, verse 13, "Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God," are not distinctive of some from other, as though some only of the nourishing righteous were so planted; but they are descriptive of them all, with an addition of the way and means whereby they are caused so to grow and flourish. And this is, their implantation in the house of the Lord; - that is, in the church, which is the seat of all the means of spiritual life, both as unto growth and flourishing, which God is pleased to grant unto believers. To be planted in the house of the Lord, is to be fixed and rooted in the grace communicated by the ordinances of divine worship. Unless we are planted in the house of the Lord, we cannot flourish in his courts. See Ps. 1: 3. Unless we are partakers of the grace administered in the ordinances, we cannot flourish in a fruitful profession. The outward participation of them is common unto hypocrites, that bear some leaves, but neither grow like the cedar nor bear fruit like the palm-tree. So the apostle prays for believers, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, that they may be "rooted and grounded in love," Eph. 3: 17, - "rooted, built up, and established," Col. 2: 7. The want hereof is the cause that we have so many fruitless professors; they have entered the courts of God by profession, but were never planted in his house by faith and love. Let us not deceive ourselves herein; - we may be entered into the church, and made partakers of the outward privileges of it, and not be so planted in it as to flourish in grace and fruitfulness.

That which on this occasion I principally intend, is the grace and privilege expressed, verse 14, "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing." There be three things which constitute a spiritual state, or belong to the life of God. 1. That believers be fat; that is, by the heavenly juice, sap, or fatness of the true olive, of Christ himself, as Rom. 11: 17. This is the principle of spiritual life and grace derived from him. When this abounds in them, so as to give them strength and vigour in the exercise of grace, to keep them from decays and withering, they are said to be fat; which, in the Scripture phrase, is strong and healthy. 2. That they flourish in the greenness (as the word is) and verdure of profession; for vigorous grace will produce a flourishing profession. 3. That they still bring forth fruit in all duties of holy obedience. All these are promised unto them even in old age.

Even trees, when they grow old (the palm and the cedar), are apt to lose of their juice and verdure: and men in old age are subject unto all sorts of decays, both outward and inward. It is a rare thing to see a man in old age naturally vigorous, healthy, and strong; and would it were not more rare to see any spiritually so at the same season! But this is here promised unto believers as an especial grace and privilege, beyond what can be represented in the growth or fruit-bearing of plants and trees.

The grace intended is, that when believers are under all sorts of bodily and natural decays, and, it may be, have been overtaken with spiritual decays also, there is provision made in the covenant to render them fat, flourishing, and fruitful, - vigorous in the power of internal grace, and

flourishing in the expression of it in all duties of obedience; which is that which we now inquire after.

Blessed be God for this good word of his grace, that he has given us such encouragement against all the decays and temptations of old age which we have to conflict withal! And the Psalmist, in the next words, declares the greatness of this privilege: "To show that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him." Consider the oppositions that lie against the flourishing of believers in old age, the difficulties of it, the temptations that must be conquered, the acting of the mind above its natural abilities which are decayed the weariness that is apt to befall us in a long spiritual conflict, the cries of the flesh to be spared, and we shall see it to be an evidence of the faithfulness, power, and righteousness of God in covenant; - nothing else could produce this mighty effect. So the prophet, treating of the same promise, Hos. 14: 4-8, closes his discourse with that blessed remark, verse 9, "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them." Spiritual wisdom will make us to see that the faithfulness and power of God are exerted in this work of preserving believers flourishing and fruitful unto the end.

Having laid the foundation of this illustrious testimony, I shall farther declare and confirm my intention, so to make way for the application of the truth under consideration unto this case, - manifesting that the way whereby we may be made partakers of this grace, is by a steady view of the glory of Christ, as proposed to us in the Gospel.

There is a latter spring in the year, a spring in autumn; it is, indeed, for the most part, but faint and weak, - yet is it such as the husbandman cannot spare. And it is an evident sign of barren ground, when it does not put forth afresh towards the end of the year. God, the good husband man, looks for the same from us, especially if we had a summer's drought in spiritual decays; as the Psalmist complains, Ps. 32: 4. Had we not had a latter spring the last year, the land had greatly suffered under the drought of the summer. And if we have had such a drought in the course of our profession by spiritual decays, as God, the good husband man, looks for a latter spring in us, even in old age, in the vigorous acting of grace and fruitful obedience; so without it we can neither have peace nor joy in our own souls. If a man, therefore, has made a great appearance of religion in his former or younger days, and when he is growing into age becomes dead, cold, worldly, selfish, - if he have no fresh springs of spiritual life in him, it is an evidence that he has a barren heart, that was never really fruitful to God. I know that many stand in need of being excited by such warning unto a diligent consideration of their state and condition.

It is true, that the latter spring does not bring forth the same fruit with the former. There is no more required in it but that the ground evidence itself to be in good heart, and put forth that which is proper unto the season. It may be, such graces as were active and vigorous in men at their first conversion unto God, as were carried in a stream of warm, natural affections, may not so eminently abound in the latter spring of old age; but those which are proper for the season - as namely, spirituality, heavenly-mindedness, weanedness from the world, readiness for the cross and death - are necessary, even in old age, to evidence that we have a living principle of grace, and to show thereby that God is upright; He is our rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

What is farther to be insisted on shall be reduced unto these four heads: -

I. That the constitution of spiritual life is such as is meet to thrive, grow, and increase unto the end, and will do so, unless it be from the default of them in whom it is.

II. That notwithstanding this nature and constitution of spiritual life, yet believers are subject unto many decays, partly gradual, and partly by surprisals in temptation, whereby the growth of it is obstructed, unto the dishonour of the gospel and the loss of their own peace with joy.

III. I shall show that such at present is the condition of many professors, - namely that they are visibly fallen under spiritual decays, and do not evidence any interest in the blessed promise insisted on.

IV. On the confirmation of these things, our inquiry will be, how such persons may be delivered from such decays, and by what means they may obtain the grace here promised, of

spiritual flourishing in old age, both in the strengthening of the inward principle of life and abounding in fruits of obedience, which are to the praise of God by Jesus Christ; and then we shall make application unto this case of that truth which is the subject of the preceding discourse.

I. The constitution of spiritual life is such as is meet to grow and increase unto the end. Hereby it does distinguish itself from that faith which is temporary; for there is a temporary faith, which will both flourish for a season and bring forth some fruit; but it is not in its nature and constitution to abide, to grow and increase, but rather to decay and wither. It is described by our Lord Jesus Christ, Matt. 13: 20, 21. Either some great temptation extinguishes it, or it decays insensibly, until the mind wherein it was do manifest itself to be utterly barren. And, therefore, whoever is sensible of any spiritual decays, he is called unto a severe trial and examination of himself, as unto the nature of the principle of his profession and obedience; for such decays do rather argue a principle of temporary faith only, unto which they are proper and natural, than that whose nature it is to thrive and grow to the end, whereon those that have it shall, as it is in the promise, still bring forth fruit, and, without their own great guilt, be always freed from such decays.

That this spiritual life is in its nature and constitution such as will abide, thrive, and grow to the end, is three ways testified unto in the Scripture.

1. In that it is compared unto things of the most infallible increase and progress; for besides that its growth is frequently likened unto that of plants and trees well watered, and in a fruitful soil, which fail not to spring, unless it be from some external violence; it is likewise compared unto such things as whose progress is absolutely infallible, Prov. 4: 18, "The path of the just is, as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." The path of the just is his covenant-walk before God, as it is frequently called in the Scripture, Ps. 119: 35, 105; Isa. 26: 7; Ps. 23: 3; Matt. 3: 3; Heb. 12: 13; and it compriseth the principle, profession, and fruits of it. This, saith the wise man, is as the shining light; that is, the morning light. And wherein is it so? Why, as that goes on by degrees, and shineth more and more unto the high noon (though it may be interrupted sometimes by clouds and storms); so is this path of the just, - it goes on and increaseth unto the high noon, the perfect day of glory. It is in its nature so to do, though it may sometimes meet with obstructions, as we shall see afterward; and so does the morning light also.

There is no visible difference, as unto light, between the light of the morning and the light of the evening; yea, this latter sometimes, from gleams of the setting sun, seems to be more glorious than the other. But herein they differ: the first goes on gradually unto more light, until it comes to perfection; the other gradually gives place unto darkness, until it comes to be midnight. So is it as unto the light of the just and of the hypocrite, and so is it as unto their paths. At first setting out they may seem alike and equal; yea, convictions and spiritual gifts acted with corrupt ends in some hypocrites, may for a time give a greater lustre of profession than the grace of others sincerely converted unto God may attain unto. But herein they discover their different natures: the one increaseth and goes on constantly, though it may be sometimes but faintly; the other decays, grows dim, gives place to darkness and crooked walking.

This, then, is the nature of the path of the just; and where it is otherwise with us in our walk before God, we can have no evidence that we are in that path, or that we have a living, growing principle of spiritual life in us. And it is fit that professors of all sorts should be minded of these things; for we may see not a few of them under visible decays, without any sincere endeavours after a recovery, who yet please themselves that the root of the matter is in them. It is so, if love of the world, conformity unto it, negligence in holy duties, and coldness in spiritual love, be an evidence of such decays. But let none deceive their own souls; wherever there is a living principle of grace, it will be thriving and growing unto the end. And if it fall under obstructions, and thereby into decays for a season, it will give no rest or quietness unto the soul wherein it is, but will labour continually for a recovery. Peace in a spiritually-decaying condition, is a soul-ruining security; better be under terror on the account of surprisal into some sin, than be in peace under evident decays of spiritual life.

And, by the way, this comparing of the path of the just unto the morning light minds me of what I have seen more than once. That light has sometimes cheerfully appeared unto the world, when, after a little season, by reason of clouds, tempests, and storms, it has given place again to darkness, like that of the night; but it has not so been lost and buried like the evening light. After a while it has recovered itself unto a greater lustre than before, manifesting that it increased in itself whilst it was eclipsed as to us. So has it been with not a few at their first conversion unto God: great darkness and trouble have, by the efficacy of temptation and injections of Satan, possessed their minds; but the grace which they have receded, being as the morning light, has after a while disentangled itself, and given evidence that it was so far from being extinguished, as that it grew and thrived under all those clouds and darkness; for the light of the just does in the issue always increase by temptations, as that of the hypocrite is constantly impaired by them.

Again, as it is as the morning light, than which nothing has a more assured progress; so it is called by our Saviour "living water," John 4: 10, yea, "a well of water, springing up into everlasting life," verse 14. It is an indeficient spring, - not a pool or pond, though never so large, which may be dried up. Many such pools of light, gifts, and profession, have we seen utterly dried up, when they have come into age, or been ensnared by the temptations of the world. And we may see others every day under dangerous decays; their countenances are changed, and they have lost that oil which makes the face of a believer to shine, - namely, the oil of love, meekness, self denial, and spirituality of converse; and instead thereof, there is spread upon them the fulsome ointment of pride, self-love, earthly-mindedness, which increaseth on them more and more. But where this principle of spiritual life is, it is as the morning light, as an indeficient spring that never fails, nor can do so, until it issue in eternal life. And sundry other ways there are whereby the same truth is asserted in the Scripture.

2. There are sundry divine promises given unto believers that so it shall be, or to secure them of such supplies of grace as shall cause their spiritual life to grow, increase, and flourish unto the end; such as that in the psalm which we have considered. For these promises are the means whereby this spiritual life is originally communicated unto us, and whereby it is preserved in us; by them are we made partakers of this divine nature, 2 Pet. 1: 4; and through them is it continued in us. Now [as to] promises of this nature, - namely, that by the dispensation of the Spirit of Christ, and supplies of his grace, our spiritual life shall flourish, and be made fruitful to the end, - I shall briefly call over one of them only at present, which is recorded, Isa. 44: 3, 4, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses."

Although this promise may have respect unto the gracious dealing of God with the people of the Jews after their return from the captivity, yet has it so only as it was typical of the redemption of the church by Jesus Christ; but it belongs properly to the times of the gospel, when the righteous were to flourish, and it is a promise of the new covenant, as is manifest in that it is not only given unto believers, but is also extended unto their seed and offspring; which is an assured signature of new covenant promises. And here is, - 1. A supposition of what we are in ourselves, both before and after our conversion unto God, - namely, as thirsty, dry, and barren ground. We have nothing in ourselves, no radical moisture to make us flourishing and fruitful. And as it is before, so it is after conversion: "We are not sufficient of ourselves; our sufficiency is of God," 2 Cor. 3: 5. Being left to ourselves, we should utterly wither and perish. But, - 2. Here is the blessed relief which God in this case has provided; he will pour the sanctifying water of his Spirit and the blessing of his grace upon us. And this he will so do as to cause us to spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses. There is nothing of a more eminent and almost visible growth than willows by the water-courses. Such shall be the spiritual growth of believers under the influences of these promises; that is, they shall be fat and flourishing, and still bring forth fruit. And other promises of the same nature there are many; but we must observe three things concerning them, that we may be satisfied in their accomplishment. As, -

(1.) The promises of the new covenant, as unto the first communication of grace unto the elect, are absolute and unconditional; they are the executive conveyances of God's immutable purposes and decrees. And what should be the condition of the communication of the first grace unto us? Nothing that is not grace can be so. If it be said that this also is of God in us, which is the condition of the communication of the first saving grace unto us, then I would know whether that be bestowed upon us without any condition. If it be, then that is the first grace, as being absolutely free; if it be not, then what is the condition whereon it is bestowed? concerning which the same inquiry must be made, - and so for ever. But this is the glory of covenant promises, that, as unto the communication of the grace of conversion and sanctification unto the elect, they are absolutely free and unconditionate. But, -

(2.) The promises which respect the growth, degrees, and measures of this grace in believers are not so. There are many duties required of us, that these promises may be accomplished towards us and in us; yea, watchful diligence in universal gospel obedience is expected from us unto this end. See 2 Pet. 1: 4-10. This is the ordinary method of the communication of all supplies of grace to make us spiritually flourish and be fruitful, - namely, that we be found in the diligent exercise of what we have received. God does sometimes deal otherwise, in a way of sovereignty, and surpriseth men with healing grace in the midst of their decays and backsliding; as Isa. 57: 17, 18. So has many a poor soul been delivered from going down into the pit. The good shepherd will go out of his way to save a wandering sheep; but this is the ordinary method.

(3.) Notwithstanding these blessed promises of growth, flourishing, and fruitfulness, if we are negligent in the due improvement of the grace which we have received, and the discharge of the duties required of us, we may fall into decays, and be kept in a low, unthrifty state all our days. And this is the principal ground of the discrepancy between the glory and beauty of the church, as represented in the promises of the Gospel, and as exemplified in the lives and walking of professors, - they do not live up unto the condition of their accomplishment in them; howbeit, in God's way and time they shall be all fulfilled. We have, therefore, innumerable blessed promises concerning the thriving, growing, and flourishing of the principle of spiritual life in us, even in old age and until death; but the grace promised unto this end will not befall us whilst we are asleep in spiritual sloth and security. Fervent prayer, the exercise of all grace received, with watchfulness unto all holy duties, are required hereunto.

3. God has secured the growth of this spiritual life, by the provision of food for it, whereby it may be strengthened and increased; for life must be preserved by food. And this in our case is the Word of God, with all other ordinances of divine worship which depend thereon, 1 Pet. 2: 2, 3. Whatever the state of this life be, - whether in its beginning, its progress, its decays, - there is suitable nourishment provided for it in the good Word of God's grace. If men will neglect their daily food that is provided for them, it is no wonder if they be weak and thriftless. And if believers are not earnest in their desires after this food, - if they are not diligent in providing of it, attending unto it, - much more if, through corruptions and temptations, they count it, in the preaching of it, light and common food, which they do not value, - it is no wonder if they fall into spiritual decays; but God has herein provided for our growth even unto old age.

And this is the first thing which was proposed unto confirmation, namely, that the constitution and nature of spiritual life is such as to be in deficient, so as to thrive and grow even in old age, and unto the end.

II. The second thing proposed is, that notwithstanding all this provision for the growth of spiritual life in us, believers, especially in a long course of profession, are subject to decays, such as may cast them into great perplexities, and endanger their eternal ruin.

And these spiritual decays are of two sorts. 1. Such as are gradual and universal, in the loss of the vigour and life of grace, both in its principle and in its excellence. 2. Such as are occasioned by surprisal into sin through the power of temptation; I mean such sins as do waste the spiritual powers of the soul, and deprive it of all solid peace.

As for temporary believers, give them but time enough in this world, especially if it be accompanied with outward prosperity or persecution; and, for the most part, their decays of one sort or another will make a discovery of their hypocrisy. Though they retain a form of godliness, they deny the power of it, Prov. 1: 31; 2 Tim. 3: 5. And if they do not openly relinquish all duties of religion, yet they will grow so lifeless and savourless in them, as shall evidence their condition; for so it is with them who are lukewarm, who are neither hot nor cold, who have a name to live, but are dead.

And herein lieth a signal difference in this matter between sincere believers and those who believe only for a time; for those of the latter sort do either not perceive their sickness and decays, - their minds being taken up and possessed with other things, - or if they do find that it is not with them as it has been formerly, they are not much concerned, and on any occasional new conviction they cry, "Yet a little more slumber, a little more sleep, a little more folding of the hands to sleep;" but when the other do find any thing of this nature, it makes them restless for a recovery. And although, through the many snares, temptations, and deceits of sin, or through their ignorance of the right way for their healing, they do not many of them obtain a speedy recovery, yet none of them do approve themselves in such a condition, or turn unto any undue reliefs.

Now, that believers are subject to decays in both the ways mentioned, we have full testimony in Scripture; for as unto that general, gradual decay, in the loss of our first faith, love, and works, in the weakening of the internal principle of spiritual life, with the loss thereon of delight, joy, and consolation, and the abatement of the fruits of obedience, our Lord Jesus Christ does expressly charge it on five of the seven churches of Asia, Rev. 2, 3. And in some of them, as Sardis and Laodicea, those decays had proceeded unto such a degree, as that they were in danger of utter rejection. And hereunto answers the experience of all churches and all believers in the world. Those who are otherwise minded are dead in sin, and have got pretences to countenance themselves in their miserable condition. So is it with the Church of Rome; and I wish others did not in some measure follow them therein.

And as unto those of the second sort, whereinto men are cast by surprisals and temptations, producing great spiritual distress and anguish of soul, under a sense of God's displeasure, we have an instance in David, as he gives us an account of himself, Ps. 38: 1-10, "O Lord, thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink, and are corrupt, because of my foolishness," &c

It is certain that here is a description of a very woeful state and condition; and the Psalmist, knowing that he was called of God to be a teacher and instructor of the church in all ages, records his own experience unto that end. Hence the title of it is, "A Psalm to bring to remembrance." Some judge that David had respect unto some great and sore disease that he was then visited withal. But if it were so, it was only an occasion of his complaint; the cause of it was sin alone. And four things he does represent. 1. That he had departed from God, and fallen into provoking sins, which had produced great distresses in his mind, verses 3, 4. 2. That he had foolishly continued in that state, not making timely application to grace and mercy for healing, whereby it was grown deplorable, verse 5. And this folly is that alone which makes such a condition dangerous, - namely, when men, on their surprisals in sin, do not speedily apply themselves unto healing remedies. 3. That he had herein a continual sense of the displeasure of God by reason of sin, verses 2-4. 4. That he was altogether restless in this state, mourning, groaning, labouring continually for deliverance.

This is a clearer delineation of the condition of believers, when, either by the greatness of any sin, or by a long continuance in an evil and a careless frame, they are cast under a sense of divine displeasure. This opens their minds and their hearts, declaring how all things are within, which they cannot deny. It is not so with many, in the same measures and degrees, as it was with David, whose falls were very great; but the substance of it is found in them all. And herein the heart

knoweth its own bitterness; a stranger intermeddleth not with it: none knows the groaning and labouring of a soul convinced of such spiritual decays, but he alone in whom they are. Hereon is it cast down to the earth, going mourning all the day long, though others know nothing of its sorrows: but it is of a far more sad consideration, to see men manifesting their inward decays by their outward fruits, and yet are little or not at all concerned therein. The former are in ways of recovery; these in the paths that go down to the chambers of death.

I suppose, therefore, I may take it for granted, that there are few professors of religion, who have had any long continuance in the ways of it, having withal been exposed unto the temptations of life, and much exercised with the occasions of it, but that they have been asleep in their days, as the spouse complains of herself, Cant. 5: 2; that is, they have been overtaken with decays of one sort or another, either with respect unto spiritual or moral duties, - in their relation unto churches or families, in their judgements or their affections, in their inward frames or outward actions, they have been overtaken with the effects of sloth, negligence, or the want of a continual watch in the life of faith. I wish it were otherwise.

I principally herein intend those gradual declensions in the life and power of grace which men in a long course of profession are subject unto. And these for the most part proceed from formality in holy duties, under the constant outward performance of them; vehement engagements in the affairs of life, an over valuation of sinful enjoyments, growth in carnal wisdom, neglect of daily mortification of such sins as men are naturally disposed unto, with a secret influence from the prevalent temptation of the days wherein we live; - which things are not now to be spoken unto.

III. But I come to that which was proposed in the third place, - namely, to show that this at present is the state of many professors of religion, that they are fallen under those spiritual decays, and do not enjoy the effects of the promises concerning flourishing and fruitfulness, which we have insisted on. To fasten a conviction on them, or some of them at least, that it is indeed so with them, is my present design; and this ought to be done with some diligence. The glory of Christ, the honour of the Gospel, and the danger of the souls of men do call for it. This is the secret root of all our evil, which will not be removed unless it be digged up. Who sees not, who complains not of the loss of, or decays in, the power of religion in the days wherein we live? But few there are who either know or apply themselves, or direct others, unto the proper remedy of this evil. Besides, it is almost as difficult to convince men of their spiritual decays as it is to recover them from them; but without this, healing is impossible. If men know not their sickness, they will not seek for a cure. Some, when they see their sickness and their wound, will apply themselves unto wrong, useless remedies, like them in the prophet Hosea, 5: 13. None will make use of any cure who see no disease at all. Wherefore, to fasten a conviction hereof on the minds of some, we may make use of the ensuing inquiries and observations.

1. Have you, in the way of your profession, had any experience of these spiritual decays? I doubt not but that there are some who have been preserved green and flourishing from their first conversion unto God, who never fell under the power of sloth, neglect, or temptation, at least not for any remarkable season; but they are but few. It was not so with scarce any of those believers under the Old Testament whose lives and walkings are recorded for our instruction; and they must be such as lived in an exact and diligent course of mortification. And some there are who have obtained relief and deliverance from under their decays, - whose backsliding have been healed, and their diseases cured. So it was with David, as he divinely expresseth it, Ps. 103: 1,3-5, "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who health all thy diseases: who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies: who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." So does he celebrate his deliverance from that state whereof he complains, Ps. 38, - which we mentioned before. And there is no grace or mercy that does more affect the hearts of believers, that gives them a greater transport of joy and thankfulness, than this of deliverance from backsliding. It is a bringing of the soul out of prison,

which enlargeth it unto praise, Ps. 142: 7. Of this sort I doubt not but that there are many; for God has given great warnings of the danger of a spiritually-decaying state; and he has made great promises of recovery from it; and multitudes in the church are daily exercised herein. But I speak in general unto all. Have you any experience of such spiritual decays, either in the frame of your spirits or in the manner of your walking before God; or, at least, that you are prone unto them, if not mightily preserved by the power of grace in your own utmost diligence? If you have not so, then I fear it is from one of these two causes: -

(1.) That, indeed, you have never had any flourishing spiritual state in your souls. He that has been always weak and sickly does not know what it is to want a state of health and strength, because he never had experience of it; much less does he that is dead know what it is to want life. But he that from an exquisite temper of health falls into languishing distemper, knows distinctly both how it was and how it is with him. And the frame of the minds of many professors of religion, with the manner of their walking, is such, as that, if they are not sensible of spiritual decays, it is evident that they never had any good spiritual health; and it is to no purpose to treat with such persons about a recovery. There are, amongst those who make an outward profession of true religion, many that live in all sorts of sins. If you should deal with them about backsliding, decays, and a recovery, you will seem unto them as Lot did to his sons-in-law, when he told them of the destruction of Sodom, - as one that mocked, or made sport with them, Gen. 19: 14; or you will be mocked by them for your pains. They have been always such as they are; it was never otherwise with them; and it is a ridiculous thing to speak to them of a recovery. We must be able in this case to say to men, "Remember whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works," Rev. 2: 5. They must have had an experience of a better state, or they will not endeavour a recovery from that wherein they are. Such, therefore, as see neither evil nor danger in their present condition, but suppose all is well enough with them, because it is as good as ever it was, will not easily be brought under this conviction; but they have that which is of no less importance for them to inquire into, - namely, whether they have had any thing of the truth of grace or no. Or,

(2.) If you have not this experience, it is to be feared that you are asleep in security, - which is hardly distinguishable from death in sin. The church of Laodicea was sensibly decayed, and gone off from its primitive faith and obedience; yet she was so secure, in her condition, knew so little of it, that she judged herself, on the contrary, to be in a thriving, flourishing state. She thought herself increased in all church riches and goods, - that is, gifts and grace, - while "she was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," Rev. 3: 17; in such a state as wherein it is questionable whether she had any thing of the life and power of grace to be found in her or no. And so is it with many churches at this day, especially that which boasts itself to be without error or blame. And it is strange that a church should suppose that it flourisheth in grace and gifts, when it has nothing but a noise of words in their stead.

So God testified concerning Ephraim, that "grey hairs were sprinkled on him, yet he knew it not," Hos. 7: 9. He was in a declining, dying condition, but did not understand it. Hence it is added, "They do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him for all this," verse 10. If men will not learn and own their spiritual decays, there is no hope of prevailing with them to return unto the Lord. "The whole have no need of a physician, but the sick;" Christ "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Such persons are under the power of a stupid security, from whence it will be very hard to rouse them up. Hence it is that we have so little success for the most part in calling persons to look after a revival and recovery of their decays; they acknowledge no such thing in themselves, - such calls may belong unto others; yea, if any word seem to come near them unto their disquietment, they are apt to think it was spoken out of spite and ill-will towards them: they approve of themselves in their present condition. Hence is the complaint of Christ in the ministry of the Word, "I have called, and ye have refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof," Prov. 1: 24, 25. Hence, let this truth be pressed a thousand times, it is not one of a

thousand who will think himself so concerned as to apply himself unto a relief. A spirit of slumber seems to be poured on many.

2. To improve this conviction, I would ask of some, whether they have been able to maintain spiritual peace and joy in their souls. I take it for granted that ordinarily they are inseparable adjuncts of the life of faith, in an humble, fruitful walk before God. The Scripture testifieth that they are so; and no experience lies against it in ordinary cases. And I suppose that those unto whom I speak do in some measure know what they are, and do not delude themselves with fancies and imaginations: they have substance in them, however by some derided, and to some unknown. Have this peace and joy been maintained and borne away in your minds? Have they under all trials and surprisals been quickly composed by them? or are you not rather on all occasions uneasy and perplexed? This is certain, that a decaying spiritual state and solid spiritual peace are inconsistent; and if ever you had such peace, you may by the loss of it know into what state you are come.

3. Not to inquire farther into things internal and hidden, wherein men may justify themselves if they please, there are too many open, visible evidences of these decays among professors of religion; they have not kept them from the eyes of the church, nor yet from the world. Do not pride, selfishness, worldliness, levity of attire, and vanity of life, with corrupt, unsavoury communication, abound among many? The world was never in a worse posture for conformity than it is at this day, wherein all flesh has corrupted its way; and yet, as to things of outward appearance, how little distinction is left between it and those who would be esteemed more strict professors of religion! Was this the way and manner of the saints of old, - of those that went before us in the same profession? Was it so with ourselves in the time of our first espousals, when we went after God in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown? as Jer. 2: 2. Some understand what I say: if we have not, some of us, had better days, we never had good days in our lives; if we have had them, why do we not stir up ourselves to look after a recovery?

4. May not God say of many of us what he said of his people of old, "Thou hast been weary of me, O Israel?" Isa. 43: 22. Have we not been weary of God, until we have abundant cause to be weary of ourselves? The most, I presume, will be ready, with them in Malachi, to say, "How or wherein have we been weary of God?" Do we not abide, yea, abound, in the duties of his service? What can be more required of us? Wherein are we to blame? This were something indeed, but that it is often so, that men are weary of God when they even weary God with their duties and services, Isa. 1: 13, 14. God says in his Word, he is weary: they say in their hearts, they are weary, Mal. 1: 13. But I answer, -

(1.) Many cannot with any modesty make use of this pretence. Their sloth, indifference, and negligence in the observance of the duties of divine worship, both in private and public, is notorious. In particular, is not the duty of family prayer neglected by many, at least as to its constancy and fervency? And although it be grounded in the light of nature, confirmed by the general rules of the Scripture, requisite unto the dedication of a family unto God, strengthened by the constant example of all the saints of old, and necessary in the experience of all that walk with God; yet do not many begin to seek out pleas and arguing to justify their omission hereof? Are not all things filled with the fruits of the negligence of such professors in the instruction of their children and servants? And has not God given severe rebukes unto many of us, in their fearful miscarriages? And as unto the public worship of God, I wish that sloth and indifference did not appear upon too many, under various pretences. But, -

(2.) This is not that which I do intend. Men may be weary of God, whilst they abide in the observance of a multitude of outward duties.

[1.] They may be so, with respect unto that spirituality and intention of mind unto the exercise of all grace, which are required unto such duties. These are the life, the soul, the animating principle of them, without which their outward performance is but a dead carcass. Men may draw nigh to God with their lips, when their hearts are far from him. This is that which becomes God in his worship, and is useful to our own souls; for "God is a Spirit, and he will be worshipped in

spirit and in truth;" which he is not, but in the exercise of the graces of his Spirit in the worshipers; "for bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things," 1 Tim. 4: 8.

To keep up the mind unto this frame, to stir up all grace unto a constant vigorous exercise in all holy duties, is a matter whereunto great spiritual diligence and watchfulness is required. Watch unto prayer. A thousand pretences rise against it; all the arts of sloth, formality, weariness of the flesh, and the business of life, do contend to frustrate the design of it. And the suitableness of resting in the work done, unto the principles of a natural conscience, gives efficacy to them all: and when men come to satisfy themselves herein, it may be it were better that for a time such duties were wholly omitted; for in that case conscience itself will urgently call on men, not hardened in sin, to a consideration of their condition: wherefore much spiritual labour and diligence is required in this matter. The outward performance of religious duties, be they never so many, or however strictly enjoined, as the daily and nightly canonical hours amongst the Popish devotionists, is an easy task, - much inferior unto the constant labour which some men use in their trades and callings. And in them, in the performance of them, either public or in their families, men may be weary of God: and according as they are remiss in the constant keeping up of spirituality, and the exercise of grace in sacred duties, so is the degree of their weariness. And there is almost nothing whereby men may take a safer measure of their decays or growth, than by the usual frame of their minds in these duties. If they do constantly in them stir up themselves to take hold of God, Isa. 64: 7, it is an evidence of a good temper of spiritual health in the soul. But this will not be done without the utmost watchfulness and care against impressions from the flesh and other temptations. But sloth and formality herein is a sign of a thriftless state in the inner man: and all inventions of such formality are disserviceable unto the interest of grace.

[2.] So is it with them also, who, attending unto the outward duties of religion, do yet indulge themselves in any known sin; for there is nothing of God in those duties which tend not unto the mortification of all sin: and men may keep up a form of godliness, to countenance themselves in the neglect of its power. And in particular, where any known sin is indulged unto, where the mortification of it is not duly endeavoured, where our religious duties are not used, applied, and directed unto that end, there is a weariness of whatever is of God in them; nor has the soul any real intercourse or communion with God by them.

5. If we should make a particular inquiry into the state of our souls with respect unto those graces which are most useful, and tend most to the glory of God, it is to be feared that the decays of many would be made very evident; such are zeal, humility, contriteness of heart, spiritual-mindedness, vigour of soul, and delight in the ways of God, love, charity, self-denial, and the like. Are we fat and flourishing in these things, even in old age? Are they in us, and do they abound? as the apostle speaks, 2 Pet. 1: 8. Do we bring forth the fruit of them, so as to show the faithfulness of God in his supply of grace? I shall not make a particular inquiry into them, but only give two general rules, whereby we may try ourselves with respect unto them all.

(1.) The loss of a spiritual appetite unto the food of our souls is an evidence of a decay in all these graces. Spiritual appetite consists in earnest desires, and a savoury relish; so it is described by the apostle, 1 Pet. 2: 2, 3, "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." There is required unto this spiritual appetite an earnest desire of the Word, grounded on an experience of the grace of God in it, unto this end, that we may grow and thrive spiritually thereby. And this appetite will give us as just a measure of the state of grace in us as a natural appetite unto wholesome food, with due digestion thereon, does give of a good state of health in the body.

This, therefore, we are to inquire into. Does it abide in us as formerly? We hear the Word preached as much as ever; but do we do it with the same desire and spiritual relish as before? Some hear to satisfy their convictions, some to please their fancies, and some to judge of the persons by whom it is dispensed. It is but in few that the necessary preparation for the due receiving of it is found.

When men grow in age, they lose much of their natural appetite unto food. They must eat still for the maintenance of life; but they do it not with that desire after it, and that gust in it, as in the days of youth and health. Hence they are apt to think that the meat which they had formerly was more savoury than what is now provided for them; though what they now enjoy is much to be preferred before what they then had. The change is in themselves. So we may find not a few professors, who are ready to think and say that the preaching which they had in former days, and the religious exercises which they were engaged in, were far to be preferred above what they now enjoy. But the change is in themselves; they have lost their spiritual appetite, or their hunger and thirst after the food of their souls.

"The full soul loatheth an honey-comb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet," Prov. 27: 7. Men being grown full of themselves, and of a good conceit of their own abilities, have lost their spiritual appetite unto the Word of God; and this makes the Word lose its power and efficacy towards them. That Word, which the Psalmist says is "sweeter than honey, or the honey-comb," Ps. 19: 10, has little or no taste or relish in it unto them. If they were hungry, they would find a sweetness in the bitterest of its reproofs, beyond what they can now find in the sweetest of its promises. They come to hear the Word with sick desires, and low expectations, as if they were invited to eat after a feast, being self-full before. But this loss of a spiritual appetite is an evidence of the decay of all other graces whatever.

(2.) A neglect of making religion our principal business, is another evidence of the decay of all sorts of grace in us. For where grace is in its proper exercise, it will subordinate all things unto religion, and the ends of it, as David twenty times declares in the 119th Psalm. All things, all occasions of life, shall be postponed thereunto. The love and valuation of it will bear sway in our minds, our thoughts, and affections; and the practice of it shall give rule unto all other concernments. But is it so with many amongst us. It is well if religion be one thing, - it is far enough from being the one thing; every other thing is preferred before it, and it can hardly crowd in to possess any place in their minds. To see men continually plodding in the affairs of the world, regulating all their acting by their concernment in them, diverting on]y at some seasons, as it were out of their way, unto duties of religion, - it is vain to say that they make religion their business. But there is scarce a more certain evidence of a frame of mind spiritually decaying in all sorts of graces, if ever any of them were in it in sincerity and power, than this one, that men do not make religion their chiefest business. And a little self-examination will help men to judge what it is that they make so to be.

(3.) Lastly, I might also instance the uselessness of men in their profession; in want of love unto all saints, barrenness in good works, unreadiness and unwillingness to comply, in any extraordinary manner, with the calls of God unto repentance and reformation; in love of the world and pride of life, with passions suited unto such principles, predominant in them: for they are all undeniable evidences, that those with whom they are found had never any true grace at all, or that they are fallen under woeful decays. But what has been spoken may be sufficient unto our present purpose.

This is the third thing that was proposed, - namely, an endeavour to leave convictions on the minds of some concerning their spiritual decays, and the necessity of seeking after a revival by the means that shall be insisted on. And I intend it principally for those of us who, under a long profession, are now come unto age, and shall not have much time for duty continued to us. And the truth is, I meet with none who are Christians of any considerable experience, and are spiritually-minded, but they are sensible of the danger of such decays in this hour of temptation, and how difficult it is, in the use of all means, to keep up a vigorous, active frame of mind, in faith, love, holiness, and fruitfulness. And for those who are not concerned herein, I confess I know not what to make of them, or their religion.

IV. I proceed unto that which was proposed in the fourth or last place, - namely, the way and means whereby believers may be delivered from these decays, and come to thrive and flourish in the inward principle and outward fruits of spiritual life; which will bring us back unto

consideration of that truth which we may seem to have diverted from. And to this end, the things ensuing are proposed unto consideration: -

1. The state of spiritual decays is recoverable. No man that is fallen under it has any reason to say, There is no hope, provided he take the right way for his recovery. If every step that is lost in the way to heaven should be irrecoverable, woe would be unto us; - we should all assuredly perish. If there were no reparation of our breaches, no healing of our decays, no salvation but for them who are always progressive in grace; if God should mark all that is done amiss, as the Psalmist speaks, "O Lord, who should stand?" nay, if we had not recoveries every day, we should go off with a perpetual backsliding. But then, as was said, it is required that the right means of it be used, and not that which is destructive of what is designed; whereof I shall give an instance. When trees grow old, or are decaying, it is useful to dig about them, and manure them; which may cause them to flourish again, and abound in fruit. But instead hereof, if you remove them out of their soil, to plant them in another, which may promise much advantage, they will assuredly wither and die. So it is with professors, and has been with many. Finding themselves under manifold decays, and little or nothing of the life and power of religion left in them, they have grown weary of their station and have changed their soil, or turning from one way in religion unto another, as some have turned Papists, some Quakers, and the like, apprehending that fault to be in the religion which they professed, which was indeed only in themselves. You cannot give an instance of any one who did not visibly wither and die therein; but, had they used the proper means for their healing and recovery, they might have lived and brought forth fruit.

2. A strict attendance unto the severities of mortification, with all the duties that lead thereunto, is required unto this end; so also is the utmost diligence in all duties of obedience. These things naturally offer themselves as the first relief in this case, and they ought not to be omitted. But if I should insist upon them, they would branch themselves into such a multitude of particular directions, as it is inconsistent with my design here to handle. Besides, the way which I intend to propose is of another nature, though consistent with all the duties included in this proposal; yea, such as without which not one of them can be performed in a due manner. Wherefore, as unto these things, I shall only assert their necessity, with a double limitation.

(1.) That no duties of mortification be prescribed unto this end, as a means of recovery from spiritual decays, but what for matter and manner are of divine institution and command. All others are laid under a severe interdict, under what pretence soever they may be used. "Who hath required these things at your hands?" Want hereof is that whereby a pretended design to advance religion in the Papacy has ruined it. They have, under the name and pretence of the means of mortification, or the duties of it, invented and enjoined, like the Pharisees, a number of works, ways, duties, so called, which God never appointed, nor approved, nor will accept; nor shall they ever do good unto the souls of men. Such are their confessions, disciplines, pilgrimages, fastings, abstinence, framed prayers, to be repeated in stated canonical hours, in such a length and number. In the bodily labour of these things they exercise themselves to no spiritual advantage.

But it is natural to all men to divert to such reliefs in this case. Those who are thoroughly convinced of spiritual decays, are therewithal pressed with a sense of the guilt of sin; for it is sin which has brought them into that condition. Hereon, in the first place, they set their contrivance at work, how they may atone divine displeasure and obtain acceptance with God; and if they are not under the actual conduct of evangelical light, two things immediately offer themselves unto them. First, Some extraordinary course in duties, which God has not commanded. This is the way which they retake themselves unto in the Papacy, and which guilt, in the darkness of corrupted nature, vehemently calls for. Secondly, An extraordinary multiplication of such duties as, for the substance of them, are required of us. An instance in both kinds we have, Micah 6: 6, 7, "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" And by this means they hope for a

restitution into their former condition. And whereas spiritual decays are of two sorts; first, from the power and effect of convictions only, which are multiplied among temporary believers; and, secondly, from degrees in the power and effects of saving grace; - those whose decays are of the first sort are never to be diverted from attempting their relief by such means; and when they find them fail, for the most part they cease contending, and abandon themselves to the power of their lusts; for they have no evangelical light to guide them in another course.

Unto them who are of the second sort is this direction given, in an endeavour for a recovery from backsliding, and thriving in grace, by a redoubled attendance unto the duties of mortification and new obedience: Let care be taken that, as unto the matter of them, they be of divine appointment; and as to the manner of their performance, that it be regulated by the rules of the Scripture. Such are constant reading and hearing of the Word, prayer with fervency therein, a diligent watch against all temptations and occasions of sin; especially an endeavour, by a holy earnestness, and vehement rebukes of the entrance of any other frame, to keep the mind spiritual and heavenly in its thoughts and affections.

(2.) Let them take heed that they attempt not these things in their own strength. When men have strong convictions that such and such things are their own duty, they are apt to act as if they were to be done in their own strength. They must do them, they will do them, - that is, as unto the outward work, - and, therefore, they think they can do them; that is, in a due manner. The Holy Ghost has for ever rejected this confidence, - none shall prosper in it, 2 Cor. 3: 5; 9: 8. But hereby many deceive themselves, labouring in the fire, while all they do does immediately perish; they have been negligent and careless, whereby things are come to an ill posture with them, and that peace which they had is impaired; but now they will pray, and read, and fast, and be liberal to the poor, and now strive after an abstinence from sin. All these things they suppose they can do of themselves, because they can and ought to perform the outward works, wherein the duties intended do consist. Hereby Christ is left out of the whole design, who, when all is done, is the Lord that health us, Exod. 15: 26. And there is another evil herein; for whatever men do in their own natural abilities, there is a secret reserve of some kind of merit in it. Those who plead for these things, do aver there can be no merit in any thing but what proceeds from our own free-will; and what is so done has some kind of merit inseparably accompanying of it; and this is enough to render all endeavours of this kind not only useless and fruitless, but utterly rejected. Faith must engage the assistance of Christ and his grace in and unto these duties; or, however they may be multiplied, they will not be effectual unto our healing and recovery. These things are to be used, according as we receive supplies of grace from above, in subordination unto that work of faith that shall be declared. Wherefore, -

3. The work of recovering backsliders or believers from under their spiritual decays is an act of sovereign grace, wrought in us by virtue of divine promises. Out of this eater comes meat. Because believers are liable to such declensions, backsliding, and decays, God has provided and given unto us great and precious promises of a recovery, if we duly apply ourselves unto the means of it. One of the places only wherein they are recorded I shall here call over and explain, Hos. 14: 1-8, "O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn unto the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips," &c. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him. I am like a green fir-tree: from me is thy fruit found."

The whole matter treated of in general, both as unto the disease and remedy, is fully stated in this passage of Scripture; and that in the experience of the church, and God's dealing with them; we may therefore receive many plain directions from it, and a safe guidance in our progress;

which we shall endeavour to take in the ensuing observations: - (1.) This application of God unto Israel, "O Israel, return," was made when the generality of the people were wicked, and devoted unto utter destruction. So it is declared in the last words of the foregoing chapter; and their desolation fell out not long after accordingly. Wherefore no season nor circumstances of things shall obstruct sovereign grace when God will exercise it towards his church: it shall work in the midst of desolating judgements.

(2.) In such a time the true Israel of God, the elect themselves, are apt to be overtaken with the sins of the whole, and so to backslide from God, and so to fall into spiritual decays. So Israel had now done, though she had not absolutely broken covenant with God. He was yet unto her "The LORD thy God;" yet she had fallen by her iniquity. Times of public apostasy are often accompanied with partial defects in the best: "Because iniquity aboundeth, the love of many shall wax cold," Matt. 24: 12.

(3.) When God designs to heal the backsliding of his people by sovereign grace, he gives them effectual calls unto repentance, and the use of means for their healing: so he does here by his prophet, "O Israel, return; take with you words." And if I could see that God did stir up his faithful ministers to apply themselves in a peculiar manner unto this work of pressing vehemently all their congregations with their duty herein, and let them know that there is no other way to prevent their ruin but by returning unto the Lord, according to the ways of it here prescribed, I should not doubt but that the time of healing were at hand.

4. The means prescribed unto this end, that our backsliding may be healed in a way suited unto the glory of God, is renewed repentance: and this acts itself, -

(1.) In fervent prayer. "Take with you words, and say." Consider the greatness and importance of the work before you, and weigh well what you do in your dealing with God. The matter of this prayer is twofold. [1.] The pardon of all iniquity; that is, the taking of it away; and no sin is omitted, all being now become equally burdensome: "Take away all iniquity." When the souls of sinners are in good earnest in their return unto God, they will leave out the consideration of no one sin whatever. Nor are we meet for healing, nor shall we apply ourselves unto it in a due manner, without some previous sense of the love of God in the pardon of our sin. [2.] Gracious acceptance: "Receive us graciously." The words in the original are only "wekach tov". And receive good;" but both the words being used variously, the sense eminently included in them is well expressed by - "Receive us graciously." After we have cast ourselves under tokens of thy displeasure, now let us know that we are freely accepted with thee. And this also lies in the desires of them who design to obtain a healing of their backsliding; for under them they are sensible that they are obnoxious unto God's displeasure.

(2.) Affectionate confessions of the sin wherein their backsliding did consist, or which were the occasions of them. "Asshur shall not save us;" - "We will say no more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods." Fleshly confidence and false worship were the two great sins that had now ruined the body of the people. These believers themselves had an accession unto them more or less, as now they have unto the prevailing sins of the days wherein we live, by conformity unto the world. Of these sins God expecteth a full and free confession, in order unto our healing.

(3.) A renewed covenant engagement to renounce all other hopes and expectation, and to retake themselves with their whole trust and confidence unto him; whereof they express, first, the cause, which was his mere grace and mercy, "For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy;" and, secondly, the effect of it, which is praise and thanksgiving, "So will we render the calves of our lips." And some things we may hence farther observe as unto the case under consideration. As, -

[1.] Although God will repair our spiritual decays and heal our backsliding freely, yet he will do it so, or in such a way, as wherein he may communicate grace unto us, to the praise of his own glory. Therefore are these duties prescribed unto us in order thereunto; for although they are not the procuring cause of the love and grace from whence alone we are healed, yet are they required, in the method of the dispensation of grace, to precede the effect of them. Nor have we anywhere a more illustrious instance and testimony of the consistency and harmony which is between

sovereign grace and the diligent discharge of our duty than we have in this place; for as God promiseth that he would heal their backsliding out of his free love, verse 4, and would do it by the communication of effectual grace, verse 5, so he enjoins them all these duties in order thereunto.

[2.] That unless we find these things wrought in us in a way of preparation for the receiving of the mercy desired, we have no firm ground of expectation that we shall be made partakers of it; for this is the method of God's dealing with the church. Then, and then only, we may expect a gracious reviving from all our decays, when serious repentance, working in the ways declared, is found in us. This grace will not surprise us in our sloth, negligence, and security, but will make way for itself by stirring us up unto sincere endeavours after it in the perseverance of these duties. And until we see better evidences of this repentance among us than as yet appears, we can have but small hopes of a general recovery from our present decays.

5. The work itself is declared, - (1.) By its nature; (2.) In its causes; (3.) From its effects.

(1.) In the nature of it, it is the healing of backsliding: "I will heal their backsliding," the sin whereby they are fallen off from God, unto whom they are now exhorted to return. These bring the souls of men into a diseased state and danger of death: the cure hereof is the work of God alone. Hence he gives himself that title, "I am the LORD that health thee," Exod. 15: 26. And because of the poisonous nature of sin, and the danger it brings of eternal death unto the souls of men, the removal of it, or a recovery from it, is often called by the name of healing, Ps 6: 2; Isa. 57: 18, 19; Hos. 6: 1. Here it includeth two things: first, the pardon of sin past; and then, a supply of grace to make us fruitful in obedience: "I will be as the dew to Israel;" as we shall see. This is God's healing of backslidings.

(2.) In the causes of it, which are, - 1. The principal moving cause; and that is, free, undeserved love: "I will love them freely." From hence alone is our recovery to be expected. 2. The efficient cause; which, as unto sins past, is pardoning mercy: "Mine anger is turned away from him;" - and as unto renewed obedience, in which too our recovery consists, it is in a plentiful supply of effectual grace: "I will be as the dew unto Israel." Fresh supplies of the Spirit of grace from above are so expressed; this is necessary unto our healing and recovery.

(3.) It is described by its effect, which is a much more abundant fruitfulness in holiness and obedience, in peace and love, than ever they had before attained. This the prophet sets out in multiplied similitudes and metaphors, to denote the greatness and efficacy of grace so communicated.

I have a little insisted on the opening of the context, for sundry reasons.

1. The case which I would consider is in all the parts of it stated distinctly, and represented clearly unto us. There is nothing remains, but only the especial way whereby, in the exercise of faith, this grace may be obtained; which is that which I shall speak unto in the last place, as that which is principally intended in this Discourse.

2. That I might show how great a thing it is to have our spiritual decays made up, our backsliding healed, and so to attain the vigorous acting of grace and spiritual life, with a flourishing profession and fruitful obedience, in old age. It is so set forth here by the Holy Ghost, as that every one must needs have a sense of the beauty and glory of the work: it is that which divine love, mercy, and grace, are eminently effectual in unto the glory of God, - that which so many duties are required to prepare us for. Let no man think that it is a light or common work; every thing in it is peculiar: it is, unto them who are made partakers of it, a life from the dead.

3. That none may utterly despond under their decays. When persons are awakened by new convictions, and begin to feel the weight of them, and how implicate they are entangled with them, they are ready to faint, and even to despair of deliverance. But we see that here is a promise of deliverance from them by pardoning mercy, and also of such fresh springs of grace as shall cause us to abound in holiness and fruitfulness. Who is it that is entangled with corruptions and temptations, that groans under a sense of a cold, lifeless, barren frame of heart? He may take in spiritual refreshment, if by faith he can make application of this promise unto himself.

4. That which remains, is to declare the particular way whereby, in the exercise of faith, we may obtain the fruit of this and all other promises of the like nature, unto the end so often proposed, - namely, of being flourishing and fruitful even in old age. Now, supposing a due attendance unto the duties mentioned, I shall give some directions with respect unto that which gives life, power, and efficacy unto them all, and which will infallibly bring us unto the full enjoyment of this signal mercy; and they are these that follow: -

1. All our supplies of grace are from Jesus Christ. Grace is declared in the promises of the Old Testament; but the way of its communication, and our receiving of it, is revealed unto us in the New. This belongs to the mystery of it, that all grace is from Christ, and shall be in vain expected any other way. He has assured us, that "without him we can do nothing;" we can no more bring forth fruit, than a branch can that is separated from the vine, John 15: 3-5. He is our head, and all our spiritual influences - that is, divine communication of grace - are from him alone. He is our life efficiently, and liveth in us effectively, so as that our ability for vital acts is from him, Gal 2: 20; Col. 3: 1-4. Are we, then, any of us under convictions of spiritual decays? or do we long for such renovations of spiritual strength as may make us flourish in faith, love, and holiness? We must know assuredly, that nothing of all this can be attained, but it must come from Jesus Christ alone. We see what promises are made, what duties are prescribed unto us; but however we should endeavour to apply ourselves unto the one or the other, they would yield us no relief, unless we know how to receive it from Christ himself.

2. The only way of receiving supplies of spiritual strength and grace from Jesus Christ, on our part, is by faith. Hereby we come unto him, are implanted in him, abide with him, so as to bring forth fruit. He dwells in our hearts by faith, and he acts in us by faith, and we live by faith in or on the Son of God. This, I suppose, will be granted, that if we receive any thing from Christ, it must be by faith, it must be in the exercise of it, or in a way of believing; nor is there any one word in the Scripture that gives the least encouragement to expect either grace or mercy from him in any other way, or by any other means.

3. This faith respects the person of Christ, his grace, his whole mediation, with all the effects of it, and his glory in them all. This is that which has been so much insisted on in the foregoing Discourses as that it ought not to be again insisted upon. This, therefore, is the issue of the whole: - a steady view of the glory of Christ, in his person, grace, and office, through faith, - or a constant, lively exercise of faith on him, according as he is revealed unto us in the Scripture, - is the only effectual way to obtain a revival from under our spiritual decays, and such supplies of grace as shall make us flourishing and fruitful even in old age. He that thus lives by faith in him shall, by his spiritual thriving and growth, "show that the Lord is upright, that he is our rock, and that there is no unrighteousness in him."

We may consider briefly, - first, how this is testified unto in the Scripture; and then, what are the ways whereby this grace or duty will produce this effect; and so put a close unto this part of the application of the sacred truth before declared.

1. This direction is given us, Ps. 34: 5, "They looked unto him, and were lightened; and their faces were not ashamed." That it is Christ, or the glory of God in him, that is thus looked unto, I need not prove, - it will not be denied. And it is their faith which is expressed by their looking unto him; which is nothing but that beholding of his glory which we have described: for it is an act of trust arising from an apprehension of who and what he is. The issue or effect hereof is, that they were lightened; that is, received fresh communication of spiritual, saving, refreshing light from him, and, consequently, of all other graces, whence their faces were not ashamed: nor shall we fail in our expectation of new spiritual communication in the exercise of the same faith.

This is that which we are called unto, Is 45: 22, "Look unto me, and be saved, all ye ends of the earth." On this look to Christ, on this view of his glory, depends our whole salvation; and therefore all things that are needful thereunto do so also: this is the way whereby we receive grace and glory. This is the direction given us by the Holy Ghost for the attaining of them.

So is the same duty described, Micah 7: 7, "Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me." The church knew not any other way of relief, whatever her distresses were.

A look unto Christ as crucified (and how glorious he was therein, has been declared) is made the cause and fountain of that godly sorrow which is a spring unto all other graces, especially in those who have fallen under decays, Zech. 12: 10; and it is so also of desiring strength from him, to enable us to endure all our trials, troubles, and afflictions, with patience unto the end, Heb. 12: 2.

2. The only inquiry remaining, is, how a constant view of the glory of Christ will produce this blessed effect in us: and it will do so several ways.

1. It will be effected by that transforming power and efficacy which this exercise of faith is always accompanied withal. This is that which changeth us every day more and more into the likeness of Christ, as has been at large before declared. Herein all revivals and all flourishing are contained. To have a good measure of conformity unto Christ is all whereof in this life we are capable: the perfection of it is eternal blessedness. According as are our attainments therein, so is the thriving and flourishing of the life of grace in us; which is that which is aimed at. Other ways and means, it may be, have failed us, let us put this to the trial. Let us live in the constant contemplation of the glory of Christ, and virtue will proceed from him to repair all our decays, to renew a right spirit within us, and to cause us to abound in all duties of obedience. This way of producing these effects flesh and blood will not reveal, - it looks like washing in Jordan to cure a leprosy; but the life of faith is a mystery known only unto them in whom it is.

2. It will fix the soul unto that object which is suited to give it delight, complacency, and satisfaction. This in perfection is blessedness, for it is caused by the eternal vision of the glory of God in Christ; and the nearer approaches we make unto this state, the better, the more spiritual, the more heavenly, is the state of our souls. And this is to be obtained only by a constant contemplation of the glory of Christ, as has been declared. And it is several ways effectual unto the end now proposed. For, -

1. The most of our spiritual decays and barrenness arise from an inordinate admission of other things into our minds; for these are they that weaken grace in all its operations. But when the mind is filled with thoughts of Christ and his glory, when the soul thereon cleaves unto him with intense affections, they will cast out, or not give admittance unto, those causes of spiritual weakness and indisposition. See Col. 3: 1-5; Eph. 5: 8.

2. Where we are engaged in this duty, it will stir up every grace unto its due exercise; which is that wherein the spiritual revival inquired after does consist. This is all we desire, all we long for, this will make us fat and flourishing, - namely, that every grace of the Spirit have its due exercise in us. See Rom. 5: 3-5; 2 Pet. 1: 5-8. Whereas, therefore, Christ himself is the first proper, adequate object of all grace, and all its exercise (for it first respects him, and then other things for him), when the mind is fixed on him and his glory, every grace will be in a readiness for its due exercise. And without this we shall never attain it by any resolutions or endeavours of our own, let us make the trial when we please.

3. This will assuredly put us on a vigilant watch and constant conflict against all the deceitful workings of sin, against all the entrances of temptation, against all the ways and means of surprisals into foolish frames, by vain imaginations which are the causes of our decays. Our recovery or revival will not be effected, nor a fresh spring of grace be obtained, in a careless, slothful course of profession. Constant watching, fighting, contending against sin, with our utmost endeavour for an absolute conquest over it, are required hereunto. And nothing will so much excite and encourage our souls hereunto as a constant view of Christ and his glory; every thing in him has a constraining power hereunto, as is known to all who have any acquaintance with these things.

End.