



Keeping the Heart

Part One

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The heart of man is his worst part before it is regenerated, and the best afterward; it is the seat of principles, and the fountain of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it.

The greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart *to* God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion, is to keep the heart *with* God. Here lies the very force and stress of religion; here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate of heaven a strait gate. Direction and help in this great work are the scope of the text: wherein we have,

I. An exhortation, “Keep thy heart with all diligence.”

II. The reason or motive enforcing it, “For out of it are the issues of life.”

I. In the exhortation I shall consider,

First, the matter of the duty.

Secondly, the manner of performing it.

First, the matter of the duty: *Keep thy heart*. Heart is not here taken properly for the noble part of the body, which philosophers call “the first that lives and the last that dies;” but by heart, in a metaphor, the Scripture sometimes represents some particular noble faculty of the soul. In Rom. 1:21, it is put for the *understanding*; *their foolish heart*, that is, their foolish understanding *was darkened*. Psalm 119:11, it is put for the memory; “Thy word have I hid in my heart;” and 1 John 3:10, it is put for the conscience, which includes both the light of the understanding and the recognitions of the memory; if *our heart condemn us*, that is, if *our conscience*, whose proper office it is to condemn.

But in the text we are to take it more generally, for the whole

soul, or inner man. What the heart is to the body, that the soul is to the man; and what health is to the heart, that holiness is to the soul. The state of the whole body depends upon the soundness and vigour of the heart, and the everlasting state of the whole man upon the good or ill condition of the soul.

By keeping the heart, understand the *diligent* and *constant* use of all holy means to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain its sweet and free communion with God. [I say *constant*, for the reason added in the text extends the duty to all the states and conditions of a Christian's life, and makes it binding always. If the heart must be kept, because out of it are the issues of life, then as long as these issues of life do flow out of it, we are obliged to keep it.] Lavater on the text will have the word taken from a besieged garrison, beset by many enemies without, and in danger of being betrayed by treacherous citizens within, in which danger the soldiers, upon pain of death, are commanded to watch; and though the expression, *Keep thy heart*, seems to put it upon us as our work, yet it does not imply a sufficiency in us to do it. We are as able to stop the sun in its course, or to make the rivers run backward, as by our own skill and power to rule and order our hearts. We may as well be our own *saviours* as our own *keepers*; and yet Solomon speaks properly enough when he says, *Keep thy heart*, because the duty is ours, though the power is of God; what power we have depends upon the exciting and assisting strength of Christ. Grace within us is beholden to grace without us. "Without me ye can do nothing." So much for the matter of the duty.

Secondly, the manner of performing it is *with all diligence*. The Hebrew is very emphatical; *keep with all keeping*, or, *keep, keep*, set double guards. This vehemency of expression with which the duty is urged, plainly implies how difficult it is to keep our hearts, how dangerous to neglect them!

The motive to this duty is very forcible and weighty: "For out of the heart are the issues of life." That is, the heart is the source of all vital operations; it is the spring and original of both good and evil, as the spring in a watch that sets all the wheels in motion. The heart is the treasury, the hand and tongue but the shops; what

is in these, comes from that; the hand and tongue always begin where the heart ends. The heart contrives, and the members execute: “a good man, out of the good treasure of his, heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.” So then, if the heart err in its work, these must miscarry in theirs; for heart errors are like the errors of the first concoction, which cannot be rectified afterward; or like the misplacing and inverting of the stamps and letters in the press, which must cause so many errata in all the copies that are printed. O then how important a duty is that which is contained in the following proposition:

The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition, is one great business of a Christian’s life.

What the philosopher says of waters, is as properly applicable to hearts; it is hard to keep them within any bounds, God has set limits to them, yet how frequently do they transgress not only the bounds of grace and religion, but even of reason and common honesty? This is that which affords the Christian matter of labour and watchfulness, to his dying day. It is not the cleaning of the *hand* that *makes* the Christian, for many a hypocrite can show as fair a hand as he; but the purifying, watching, and right ordering of the *heart*; this is the thing that provokes so many sad complaints, and costs so many deep groans and tears. It was the pride of Hezekiah’s heart that made him lie in the dust, mourning before the Lord. It was the fear of hypocrisy’s invading the heart that made David cry, “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.” It was the sad experience he had of the divisions and distractions of his own heart in the service of God, that made him pour out the prayer, “Unite my heart to fear thy name.”

The method in which I propose to improve the proposition is this:

First, I shall inquire what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

Secondly, Assign divers reasons why Christians must make this

a leading business of their lives.

Thirdly, Point out those seasons which especially call for this diligence in keeping the heart.

Fourthly, Apply the whole.

First, I am to consider what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

To keep the heart, necessarily supposes a previous work of regeneration, which has set the heart right, by giving it a new spiritual inclination, for as long as the heart is not *set right* by grace as to its habitual frame, no means can *keep it right* with God. Self is the poise of the unrenewed heart, which biases and moves it in all its designs and actions; and as long as it is so, it is impossible that any external means should keep it with God.

Man, originally, was of one constant, uniform frame of spirit, held one straight and even course; not one thought or faculty was disordered: his mind had a perfect knowledge of the requirements of God, his will a perfect compliance therewith; all his appetites and powers stood in a most obedient subordination.

Man, by the apostasy, is become a most disordered and rebellious creature, opposing his Maker, as the *First Cause*, by self-dependence; as the *Chief Good*, by self-love; as the *highest Lord*, by self-will; and as the *Last End*, by self-seeking. Thus he is quite disordered, and all his actions are irregular. But by regeneration the disordered soul is set right; this great change being, as the Scripture expresses it, the renovation of the soul after the image of God, in which *self-dependence* is removed by faith; *self-love*, by the love of God; *self-will*, by subjection and obedience to the will of God; and *self-seeking* by self-denial. The darkened understanding is illuminated, the refractory will sweetly subdued, the rebellious appetite gradually conquered. Thus the soul which sin had universally depraved, is by grace restored. This being presupposed, it will not be difficult to apprehend what it is to keep the heart, which is nothing but *the constant care and diligence of such a renewed man to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace has raised it*. For though grace has, in a great measure, rectified the soul, and given it an habitual heavenly

temper; yet sin often actually discomposes it again; so that even a gracious heart is like a musical instrument, which though it be exactly tuned, a small matter brings it out of tune again; yea, hang it aside but a little, and it will need setting again before another lesson can be played upon it. If gracious hearts are in a desirable frame in one duty, yet how dull, dead, and disordered when they come to another! Therefore every duty needs a particular preparation of the heart. "If thou prepare thine heart and stretch out thine hands toward him," &c. To keep the heart then, is carefully to preserve it from sin, which disorders it; and maintain that spiritual frame which fits it for a life of communion with God.

This includes in it six particulars:

1. Frequent observation of the frame of the heart. Carnal and formal persons take no heed to this; they cannot be brought to confer with their own hearts: there are some people who have lived forty or fifty years in the world, and have had scarcely one hour's discourse with their own hearts. It is a hard thing to bring a man and himself together on such business; but saints know those soliloquies to be very salutary. The heathen could say, "the soul is made wise by sitting still in quietness." Though bankrupts care not to look into their accounts, yet upright hearts will know whether they go backward or forward. "I commune with mine own heart," says David. The heart can never be kept until its case be examined and understood.

2. It includes deep humiliation for heart evils and disorders; thus Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart. Thus the people were ordered to spread forth their hands to God in prayer, realizing the plague of their own hearts. Upon this account many an up-right heart has been laid low before God; *'O what an heart have I.'* Saints have in their confession pointed at the heart, the pained place: *'Lord, here is the wound.'* It is with the heart well kept, as it is with the eye; if a small dust get into the eye it will never cease twinkling and watering till it has wept it out: so the upright heart cannot be at rest till it has wept out its troubles and poured out its complaints before the Lord.

3. It includes earnest supplication and instant prayer for purifying and rectifying grace when sin has defiled and disordered

the heart. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "Unite my heart to fear thy name." Saints have always many such petitions before the throne of God's grace; this is the thing which is most pleaded by them with God. When they are praying for outward mercies, perhaps their spirits may be more remiss; but when it comes to the heart's case, they extend their spirits to the utmost, fill their mouths with arguments, weep and make supplication: 'O for a better heart! O for a heart to love God more; to hate sin more; to walk more evenly with God. Lord! deny not to me such a heart, whatever thou deny me: give me a heart to fear thee, to love and delight in thee, if I beg my bread in desolate places.' It is observed of an eminent saint, that when he was confessing sin, he would never give over confessing until he had felt some brokenness of heart for that sin; and when praying for any spiritual mercy, would never give over that suit till he had obtained some relish of that mercy.

4. It includes the imposing of strong engagements upon ourselves to walk more carefully with God, and avoid the occasions whereby the heart may be induced to sin. Well advised and deliberate vows are, in some cases, very useful to guard the heart against some special sin. "I have made a covenant with mine eyes," says Job. By this means holy men have overawed their souls, and preserved themselves from defilement.

5. It includes a constant and holy jealousy over our own hearts. Quick sighted self-jealousy is an excellent preservative from sin. He that will keep his heart, must have the eyes of the soul awake and open upon all the disorderly and tumultuous stirrings of his affections; if the affections break loose, and the passions be stirred, the soul must discover it, and suppress them before they get to a height. 'O my soul, dost thou well in this? my tumultuous thoughts and passions, where is your commission?' Happy is the man that thus feareth always. By this fear of the Lord it is that men depart from evil, shake off sloth, and preserve themselves from iniquity. He that will keep his heart must eat and drink with fear, rejoice with fear, and pass the whole time of his sojourning here in fear. All this is little enough to keep the heart from sin.

6. It includes the realizing of God's presence with us, and setting

the Lord always before us. This the people have found a powerful means of keeping their hearts upright, and awing them from sin. When the eye of our faith is fixed upon the eye of God's omniscience, we dare not let out our thoughts and affections to vanity. Holy Job durst not suffer his heart to yield to an impure, vain thought, and what was it that moved him to so great circumspection? He tells us, "Doth not He see my ways, and count all my steps?"

In such particulars as these do gracious souls express the care they have of their hearts. They are careful to prevent the breaking loose of the corruptions in time of temptation; careful to preserve the sweetness and comfort they have got from God in any duty. This is the work, and of all works in religion it is the most difficult, constant, and important work.

(1). It is the hardest work. Heart-work is hard work indeed. To shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit, will cost no great pains; but to set thyself before the Lord, and tie up thy loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon him; this will cost thee something. To attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put thy meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy; but to get thy heart broken for sin, while thou art confessing it; melted with free grace while thou art blessing God for it; to be really ashamed and humbled through the apprehensions of God's infinite holiness, and to keep thy heart in this frame; not only in, but after duty, will surely cost thee some groans and pains of soul. To repress the outward acts of sin, and compose the external part of thy life in a laudable manner, is no great matter; even carnal persons, by the force of common principles, can do this: but to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up an holy government over thy thoughts, to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart, this is not easy.

(2). It is a constant work. The keeping of the heart is a work that is never done till life is ended. There is no time or condition in the life of a Christian which will suffer an intermission of this work. It is in keeping watch over our hearts, as it was in keeping up Moses' bands while Israel and Amalek were fighting. No sooner do the hands of Moses grow heavy and sink down, than Amalek prevails.

Intermitting the watch over their own hearts for but a few minutes, cost David and Peter many a sad day and night.

(3). It is the most important business of a Christian's life. Without this we are but formalists in religion: all our professions, gifts and duties signify nothing. "My son, give me thine heart," is God's request. God is pleased to call that a gift which is indeed a debt; he will put this honour upon the creature, to receive it from him in the way of a gift; but if this be not given him, he regards not whatever else you bring to him. There is only so much of worth in what we do, as there is of heart in it. Concerning the heart, God seems to say, as Joseph of Benjamin, "If you bring not Benjamin with you, you shall not see my face." Among the Heathen, when the beast was cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart; and if that was unsound and worthless the sacrifice was rejected. God rejects all duties (how glorious soever in other respects) which are offered him without the heart. He that performs duty without the heart, that is, heedlessly, is no more accepted with God than he that performs it with a double heart, that is, hypocritically.

Thus I have briefly considered what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports. I proceed,

Secondly, To assign some reasons why Christians must make this the great business of their lives.

The importance and necessity of making this our great business will manifestly appear from several considerations:

1. The glory of God is much concerned. Heart-evils are very provoking evils to the Lord. The Schools correctly observe, that outward sins are "sins of great infamy;" but that the heart sins are "sins of deeper guilt." How severely has the great God declared his wrath from heaven against heart-wickedness! The crime for which the old world stands indicted is heart-wickedness! "God saw that every imagination of their hearts was only evil, and that continually;" for which he sent the most dreadful judgments that were ever inflicted since time began. We find not their murders, adulteries, blasphemies, (though they were defiled with these) particularly alleged against them; but the evils of their hearts. That

by which God was so provoked as to give up his peculiar inheritance into the enemy's hand, was the evil of their hearts. "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved; how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?"

Of the wickedness and vanity of their thoughts God took particular notice; and because of this the Chaldeans. must come upon them, "as a lion from his thicket and tear them to pieces." For the sin of thoughts it was that God threw down the fallen, angels from heaven and still keeps them in "everlasting chains." to the judgment of the great day; *by* which expression is not obscurely intimated some extraordinary judgment to which they are reserved; as prisoners that have most irons laid upon them may be supposed to be the greatest malefactors. And what was their sin? Spiritual wickedness. Merely heart-evils are so provoking to God, that for them he rejects with indignation all the duties that some men perform. "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrifices a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol." In what words could the abhorrence of a creature's actions be more fully expressed by the holy God? Murder and idolatry are not more vile in his account, than, their sacrifices, though *materially* such as himself appointed. And what made their sacrifices so vile? The following words inform us: "Their soul delighteth in their abominations."

Such is the vileness of mere heart-sins, that the Scriptures sometimes intimate the difficulty of pardon for them. The heart of Simon Magus was not right, he had base thoughts of God, and of the things of God: the apostle bade him "repent and pray, if perhaps the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven him." O then never slight heart evils! for by these God is highly wronged and provoked. For this reason let every Christian keep his heart with all diligence.

2. The sincerity of our profession much depends upon the care we exercise in keeping our hearts. Most certainly, that man who is careless of the frame of his heart is but a hypocrite in his profession, however eminent he be in the externals of religion. We have a striking instance of this in the history of Jehu. "But Jehu

took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord God of Israel with his heart.” The context gives an account of the great service performed by Jehu against the house of Ahab and Baal, and also of the great temporal reward given him by God for that service, even that his children, to the fourth generation, should sit upon the throne of Israel. Yet in these words Jehu is censured as a hypocrite: though God approved and rewarded the work, yet he abhorred and rejected the person that did it, as hypocritical. Wherein lay the hypocrisy of Jehu? In this; he took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord with his heart; that is, he did all insincerely and for selfish ends: and though the work he did was *materially* good, yet he, not purging his heart from those unworthy selfish designs in doing it, was a hypocrite. And though Simon Magus appeared such a person that the apostle could not regularly reject him, yet his hypocrisy was quickly discovered. Though he professed piety and associated himself with the saints, he was a stranger to the mortification of heart-sins. “Thy heart is not right with God.” It is true, there is great difference between Christians themselves in their diligence and dexterity about heart work; some are more conversant with, and more successful in it than others but he that takes no heed to his heart, that is not *careful* to order it aright before God, is but a hypocrite. “And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.” Here was a company of formal hypocrites, as is evident from that expression, *as my people*; like them, but not of them. And what made them so? Their outside was fair; here were reverent postures, high professions, much seeming delight in ordinances; “thou art to them as a lovely song:” yea, but for all that they kept not their hearts with God in those duties; their hearts were commanded by their lusts, they went after their covetousness. Had they kept their hearts with God, all had been well: but not regarding which way their hearts went in duty, there lay the essence of their hypocrisy.

If any upright soul should hence infer, I am a hypocrite too, for many times my heart departs from God in duty; do what I can, yet I cannot hold it close with God; I answer, the very objection carries

in it its own solution. Thou sayest, Do what I can, yet! cannot keep my heart with God. Soul, if thou doest what thou canst, thou hast the blessing of an upright, though God sees good to exercise thee under the affliction of a discomposed heart.

There still remains some wildness in the thoughts and fancies of the best to humble them; but if you find a care before to prevent them, and opposition against them when they come, and grief and sorrow afterward, you find enough to clear you from the charge of reigning hypocrisy. This precaution is seen partly in laying up the word in thy heart to prevent them. “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” Partly in your endeavours to engage your heart to God; and partly in begging preventing grace from God in your commencement of duty. It is a good sign to exercise such precaution. And it is an evidence of uprightness, to oppose these sins in their first rise. “I hate vain thoughts.” “The spirit lusteth against the flesh.” Thy grief also discovers the uprightness of thy heart. If with Hezekiah thou art humbled for the evils of thy heart, thou hast no reason, from those disorders, to question the integrity of it; but to suffer sin to lodge quietly in the heart, to let thy heart habitually and without control wander from God, is a sad, a dangerous symptom indeed.

3. The beauty of our conversation arises from the heavenly frame of our spirits. There is a spiritual lustre and beauty in the conversation of saints. “The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour;” saints shine as the lights of the world; but whatever lustre and beauty is in their lives, comes from the excellency of their spirits; as the candle within puts lustre upon the lantern in which it shines. It is impossible that a disordered and neglected heart should ever produce well ordered conversation; and since (as the text observes) the issues or streams of life flow out of the heart as their fountain, it must follow, that such as the heart is, the life will be. Hence 1 Peter 2:12, “Abstain from fleshly lusts—having your conversation honest,” or beautiful, as the Greek word imports. So Isaiah, 55:7. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.” *His way*, denotes the course of his life; *his thoughts*, the frame of his heart: and therefore since the course of his life flows from his thoughts, or the frame of his heart,

both, or neither will be forsaken. The heart is the source of all actions; these actions are virtually and radically contained in our thoughts; these thoughts being once made up into affections, are quickly made out into suitable actions. If the heart be wicked, then, as Christ says, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders,” &c. Mark the order: first, wanton or revengeful thoughts then unclean, or murderous practices. And if the heart be holy, then it is as with David: “My heart is inditing a good matter—I speak of the things which I have made. my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer.” Here is a life richly beautified with good works, some ready made—*I will speak of the things which I have made*; others making—*my heart is inditing*; both proceed from the heavenly frame of his heart. Put the heart in frame and the life will quickly discover that it is so.

It is not very difficult to discern, *by* the performances and converse of Christians, what frames their spirits are in. Take a Christian in a good frame, and how serious, heavenly and profitable will his conversation and religious exercises be! what a lovely companion is he during the continuance of it! it would do any one’s heart good to be with him at such a time. “The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment; the law of his God is in his heart.” When the heart *is* up with God, and full of God how dexterously will he insinuate spiritual discourse, improving every occasion and advantage to some heavenly purpose! Few words then run to waste. And what can be the reason that the discourses and duties of many Christians are become *so* frothy and unprofitable, their communion both with God and with one another becomes as a dry stalk, but this, their hearts are neglected? Surely this must be the reason of it, and it is an evil greatly to be bewailed.

Thus the attracting beauty that was wont to shine, from the conversation of the saints, upon the faces and consciences of the world, (which, if it did not allure and bring them in love with the ways of God, at least left a testimony in their consciences of the excellency of those men and of their ways,) is in a great measure lost, to the unspeakable detriment of religion.

Time was, when Christians conducted in such a manner that the

world stood gazing at them. Their life and language were of a different strain from those of others; their tongues discovered them to be *Galileans* wherever they came. But now, since vain speculations and fruitless controversies have so much obtained, and heart-work, practical godliness is so much neglected among professors, the case is sadly altered: their discourse is become like other men's; if they come among you now, they may "hear every man speak in his own language." And I have little hope to see this evil redressed, and the credit of religion repaired, till Christians do their first works, till they apply again to heart-work: when the salt of heavenly-mindedness is cast into the spring, the streams will run more clear and more sweet.

4. The comfort of our souls much depends upon the keeping of our hearts; for he that is negligent in attending to his own heart, is, ordinarily, a great stranger to assurance, and the comforts following from it. Indeed if The Antinomian doctrine were true, which teaches you to reject all marks and signs for the trial of your condition, telling you that it is the Spirit that immediately assures you, by witnessing your adoption directly, *without them*; then you might be careless of your hearts, yea, strangers to them, and yet no strangers to comfort: but since both Scripture and experience confute this, I hope you will never look for comfort in this unscriptural way.

I deny not that it is the work and office of the Spirit to assure you; yet I confidently affirm, that if ever you attain assurance in the ordinary way wherein God dispenses it, you must take pains with your own hearts. You may *expect* your comforts upon *easier* terms, but I am mistaken if ever you *enjoy* them upon *any other*: *give all diligence; prove yourselves*; this is the scriptural method.

A distinguished writer, in his treatise on the covenant, tells us that he knew a Christian who, in the infancy of his Christianity, so vehemently panted after the infallible assurance of God's love, that for a long time together he earnestly desired some voice from heaven; yea, sometimes walking in the solitary fields, earnestly desired some miraculous voice from the trees and stones there: this, after many desires and longings, was denied; but in time a better was afforded in the ordinary way of searching the word and

his own heart.

An instance of the like nature another learned person gives us of one that was driven by temptation upon the very borders of despair; at last, being sweetly settled and assured, one asked him how he attained it; he answered, "Not by any extraordinary revelation, but by subjecting my understanding to the Scriptures, and comparing my heart with them."

The Spirit, indeed, assures by witnessing our adoption; and he witnesses in two ways. One way is, objectively, that is, by producing those graces in our souls which are the conditions of the promise.; and so the Spirit, and his graces in us, are all one: the Spirit of God dwelling in us, is a mark of our adoption. Now the Spirit can be discerned, not in his essence, but in his operations; and to discern these, is to discern the Spirit; and how these can be discerned without serious searching and diligent watching of the heart I cannot imagine. The other way of the Spirit's witnessing is effectively, that is, by irradiating the soul with a grace discovering light, shining upon his own work; and this, in order of nature, follows the former work: he first infuses the grace, and then opens the eye of the soul to see it. Now, since the heart is the subject of that infused grace, even this way of the Spirit's witnessing includes the necessity of carefully keeping our own hearts. For,

(1). A neglected heart is so confused and dark, that the little grace which is in it is not ordinarily discernible: the most accurate and laborious Christians sometimes find it difficult to discover the pure and genuine workings of the Spirit in their hearts. How then shall the Christian who is comparatively negligent about heart-work, be ever able to discover grace? Sincerity! which is the thing sought, lies in the heart like a small piece of gold on the bottom of a river; he that would find it must stay till the water is clear, and then he will see it sparkling at the bottom. That the heart may be clear and settled, how much pains and watching, care and diligence, are requisite!

(2). God does not usually indulge negligent souls with the comforts of assurance; he will not so much as seem to patronize sloth and carelessness. He will give assurance, but it shall be in his own way; his command hath united our care and comfort together.

Those are mistaken who think that assurance may be obtained without labour. Ah! how many solitary hours have the people of God spent in heart-examination! how many times have they looked into the word, and then into their hearts! Sometimes they thought they discovered sincerity, and were even ready to draw forth the triumphant conclusion of assurance; then comes a doubt they cannot resolve, and destroys it all: many hopes and fears, doubtings and reasonings, they have had in their own breasts before they arrived at a comfortable settlement. But suppose it possible for a careless Christian to attain assurance, yet it is impossible for him long to retain it; for it is a thousand to one if those whose hearts are filled with the joys of assurance, long retain those joys, unless extraordinary care be used. A little pride, vanity, or carelessness will dash to pieces all that for which they have been a long time labouring in many a weary duty. Since then the joy of our life, the comfort of our souls, rises and falls with our diligence in this work, keep your heart with all diligence.

5. The improvement of our graces depends on the keeping of our hearts. I never knew grace to thrive in a careless soul. The habits and roots of grace are planted in the heart; and the deeper they are rooted there, the more flourishing grace is. In Eph. 3: 17, we read of being “rooted” in grace; grace in the heart *is* the root of every gracious word in the mouth, and of every holy work in the hand. It is true, Christ is the root of a Christian, but Christ is the originating root, and grace a root originated, planted, and influenced by Christ; accordingly, as this thrives under divine influences, the acts of grace are more or less fruitful or vigorous. Now, in a heart not kept with care and diligence, these fructifying influences are stopped and cut off—multitudes of vanities break in upon it, and devour its strength; the heart is, as it were, the inclosure, in which multitudes of thoughts are fed every day; a gracious heart, diligently kept, feeds many precious thoughts of God in a day. “How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.” And as the gracious heart nourishes them, so they refresh and feast the heart. “My soul is filled as with marrow and fatness while I think upon thee,” &c.

But in the disregarded heart, multitudes of vain and foolish thoughts are perpetually working, and drive out those spiritual thoughts of God by which the soul should be refreshed. Besides, the careless heart profits nothing by any duty or ordinance it performs or attends upon, and yet these are the conduits of heaven, whence grace is watered and made fruitful. A man may go with a heedless spirit from ordinance to ordinance, abide all his days under the choicest teaching, and yet never he improved by them; for heart-neglect is a leak in the bottom—no heavenly influences, however rich, abide in that soul. When the seed falls upon the heart that lies open and common, like the highway, free for all passengers, the fowls come and devour it. Alas! it is not enough to hear, unless we take heed how we hear; a man may pray, and never be the better, unless he watch unto prayer. In a word, all means are blessed to the improvement of grace, according to the care and strictness we use in keeping our hearts in them.

6. The stability of our souls in the hour of temptation depends upon the care we exercise in keeping our hearts. The careless heart is an easy prey to Satan in the hour of temptation; his principal batteries are raised against the heart; if he wins that he wins all, for it commands the whole man: and alas! how easy a conquest is a neglected heart! It is not more difficult to surprise such a heart, than for an enemy to enter that city whose gates are open and unguarded. It *is* the watchful heart that discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes to its strength.

Divines observe this to be the method in which temptations are ripened and brought to their full strength. There is the irritation of the object, or that power it has to provoke our corrupt nature; which is either done by the real presence of the object, or by speculation when the object (though absent) is held out by the imagination before the soul. Then follows the motion of the appetite, which is provoked by the fancy representing it as a sensual good. Then there is a consultation in the mind about the best means of accomplishing it. Next follows the election, or choice of the will. And lastly, the desire, or full engagement of the will to it.

All this may be done in a few minutes, for the debates of the soul

are quick and soon ended: when it comes thus far, the heart is won, Satan hath entered victoriously and displayed his colours upon the walls of that royal fort; but, had the heart been well guarded at *first*, it had never come to this—the temptation had been stopped in the first or second act. And indeed there it is stopped easily; for it is in the motion of a soul tempted to sin, as in the motion of a stone falling from the brow of a hill—it is easily stopped at first, but when once it is set in motion “it acquires strength by descending.” Therefore it is the greatest wisdom to observe the first motions of the heart, to check and stop sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at first; a little care and watchfulness may prevent much mischief now; the careless heart not heeding this, is brought within the power of temptation, as the Syrians were brought blind-fold into the midst of Samaria, before they knew where they were.

I hope that these considerations satisfy my readers that it is important to keep the heart with all diligence. I proceed,

Thirdly, To point out those special seasons in the life of a Christian which require our utmost diligence in keeping the heart. Though (as was observed before) the duty is always binding, and there is no time or condition of life in which we may be excused from this work; yet there are some signal seasons, critical hours, requiring more than common vigilance over the heart.

The *first season* is the time of prosperity, when Providence smiles upon us. Now, Christian, keep thy heart with all diligence; for it will be very apt to grow secure, proud and earthly. “To see a man humble in prosperity,” (says Bernard,) “is one of the greatest rarities in the world.” Even a good Hezekiah could not hide a vain-glorious temper in his temptation; hence that caution to Israel: “And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore to thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities which thou buildedst not, and houses full of all good things which thou filledst not,” &c. “then beware lest thou forget the Lord.” So indeed it happened: for “Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked?” How then may a Christian keep his heart from pride and carnal security under the smiles of Providence and the confluence of creature-comforts?

There are several helps to secure the heart from the dangerous snares of prosperity.

1. Consider the dangerous ensnaring temptations attending a pleasant and prosperous condition. Few, very few of those that live in the pleasures of this world, escape everlasting perdition. "It is easier" (says Christ) "for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Not many mighty, not many noble are called."

We have great reason to tremble, when the Scripture tells us in general that few shall be saved; much more when it tells us, that of that rank of which we are, but few shall be saved. When Joshua called all the tribes of Israel to cast lots for the discovery of Achan, doubtless Achan feared; when the tribe of Judah was taken, his fear increased; but when the family of the Zarhites was taken, it was time to tremble. So when the Scriptures come so near as to tell us that of such a class of men very few shall escape, it is time to be alarmed. "I should wonder" (says Chrysostom) "if any of the rulers be saved." O how many have been wheeled to hell in the chariots of earthly pleasures, while others have been whipped to heaven by the rod of affliction! How few, like the daughter of Tyre, come to Christ with a gift! How few among the rich entreat his favour!

2. It may keep one more humble and watchful in prosperity, to consider that among Christians many have been much the worse for it. How good had it been for some of them, if they had never known prosperity! When they were in a low condition, how humble, spiritual and heavenly they were but when advanced, what an apparent alteration has been upon their spirits! It was so with Israel; when they were in a low condition in the wilderness, then Israel was "holiness to the Lord;" but when they came into Canaan and were richly fed, their language was, "We are lords, we will come no more unto thee." Outward gains are ordinarily attended with inward losses; as in a low condition their civil employments were wont to have a savour of their religious duties, so in an exalted condition their duties commonly have a savour of the world. He, indeed, is rich in grace whose graces are not hindered by his riches. There are but few Jehosaphats in the world, of whom it is said, "He had silver and gold in abundance, and his heart was

lifted up in the way of God's commands." Will not this keep thy heart humble in prosperity, to think how dearly many godly men have paid for their riches; that through them they have lost that which all the world cannot purchase?

3. Keep down thy vain heart by this consideration; God values no man the more for these things. God values no man by outward excellencies, but by inward graces; they are the internal ornaments of the Spirit, which are of great price in God's sight. God despises all worldly glory, and accepts no man's person; "but in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him." Indeed, if the judgment of God went by the same rule that man's does, we might value ourselves by these things, and stand upon them: but so much every man is, as he is in the judgment of God. Does thy heart yet swell, and will neither of the former considerations keep it humble?

4. Consider how bitterly many dying persons have bewailed their folly in setting their hearts upon these things, and have wished that they had never known them. How dreadful was the situation of Pius Quintus, who died crying out despairingly, "When I was in a low condition I had some hopes of salvation, when I was advanced to be a cardinal, I greatly doubted; but since I came to the popedom I have no hope at all." An author also tells us a real, but sad story of a rich oppressor, who had scraped up a great estate for his only son: when he came to die he called his son to him, and said, "Son, do you indeed love me?" The son answered that "Nature, besides his paternal, indulgence, obliged him to that." "Then (said the father) express it by this: hold thy finger in the candle as long as I am saying a prayer." The son attempted, but could not endure it. Upon that the father broke out into these expressions: "Thou canst not suffer the burning of thy finger for me; but to get this wealth I have hazarded my soul for thee and must burn, body and soul, in hell, for thy sake; thy pains would have been but for a moment, but mine will be unquenchable fire."

5. The heart may be kept humble by considering of what a clogging nature earthly things are to a soul heartily engaged in the way to heaven. They shut out much of heaven from us at present, though they may not shut us out of heaven at last. If thou consider

thyself as a stranger in this world, travelling for heaven, thou hast then as much reason to be delighted with these things as a weary horse has to be pleased with a heavy burden. There was a serious truth in the atheistical scoff of Julian: when taking away the Christians' estates, he told them "it was to make them more fit for the kingdom of heaven."

6. Is thy spirit still vain and lofty? Then urge upon it the consideration of that awful day of reckoning, wherein, according to our receipts of mercies shall be our account for them. Methinks this should awe and humble the vainest heart that ever was in the breast of a saint. Know for a certainty that the Lord records all the mercies that ever he gave thee, from the beginning to the end of thy life. "Remember, O my people, from Shittim unto Gilgal," &c. Yes, they are exactly numbered and recorded in order to an account; and thy account will be suitable: "To whomsoever much is given, of him shall, much be required." You are but a steward, and your Lord will come and take an account of you; and what a great account have you to make, who have much of this world in your hands. What swift witnesses will your mercies be against you, if this be the best fruit of them!

7. It is a very humbling reflection, that the mercies of God should work otherwise upon my spirit than they used to do upon the spirits of others to whom they come as sanctified mercies from the love of God. Ah, Lord! what a sad consideration is this! enough to lay me in the dust, when I consider:

(1). That their mercies have greatly humbled them, the higher God has raised them, the lower they have laid themselves before him. Thus did Jacob when God had given him much substance. "And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and all the truth which thou hast showed thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and am now become two bands." Thus also it was with holy David; when God had confirmed the promise to him, to build him a house, and not reject him as he did Saul, he goes in before the Lord and says, "Who am I, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" So indeed God required. When Israel brought to him the first fruits of Canaan, they were to say, "A Syrian ready to perish was my

father,” &c. Do others raise God the higher for his raising them? and the more God raises me, the more shall I abuse him and exalt myself? O how wicked is such conduct as this!

(2). Others have freely ascribed the glory of all their enjoyments to God, and magnified not themselves, but him, for their mercies. Thus says David, “Let thy name be magnified and the house of thy servant be established.” He does not fly upon the mercy and suck out its sweetness, looking no further than his own comfort: no, he cares for no mercy except God be magnified in it. So when God had delivered him from all his enemies, he says, “The Lord is my strength and my rock, he is become my salvation.” Saints of old did not put the crown upon their own heads as I do by my vanity.

(3). The mercies of God have been melting mercies unto others, melting their souls in love to the God of their mercies. When Hannah received the mercy of a son, she said, “My soul rejoiceth in the Lord;” not in the mercy, but in the God of the mercy. So also Mary: “My soul doth magnify the Lord; my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour.” The word signifies to make more room for God; their hearts were not contracted, but the more enlarged to God.

(4). The mercies of God have been great restraints to keep others from sin. “Seeing thou, our God, hast given us such a deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments?” Ingenuous souls have felt the force of the obligations of love and mercy upon them.

(5). The mercies of God to others have been as oil to the wheels of their obedience, and made them more fit for service. Now if mercies work contrarily upon my heart, what cause have I to be afraid that they come not to me in love! It is enough to damp the spirits of any saint, to see what sweet effects mercies have had upon others, and what bitter effects upon him.

The *second season* in the life of a Christian, requiring more than common diligence to keep his heart, is the time of *adversity*. When Providence frowns upon you, and blasts your outward comforts, then look to your heart; keep it with all diligence from repining against God, or fainting under his hand; for troubles, though

sanctified, are troubles still. Jonah was a good man, and yet how fretful was his heart under affliction! Job was the mirror of patience, yet how was his heart discomposed by trouble! You will find it hard to get a composed spirit under great afflictions. O the hurries and tumults which they occasion even in the best hearts! Let me show you, then, how a Christian under great afflictions may keep his heart from repining or desponding, under the hand of God.

I will here offer several helps to keep the heart in this condition.

1. By these cross providences God is faithfully pursuing the great design of electing love upon the souls of his people, and orders all these afflictions as means sanctified to that end. Afflictions come not by casualty, but by counsel. By this counsel of God they are ordained as means of much spiritual good to saints. "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged," &c. "But he for our profit," &c. "All things work together for good," &c. They are God's workmen upon our hearts, to pull down the pride and carnal security of them; and being so, their nature is changed; they are turned into blessings and benefits. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," says David. Surely then thou hast no reason to quarrel with God, but rather to wonder that he should concern himself so much in thy good as to use any means for accomplishing it. Paul could bless God if by any means he might attain the resurrection of the dead. "My brethren," says James, "count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations." 'My Father is about a design of love upon my soul, and do I well to be angry with him? All that he does is in pursuance of, and in reference to some eternal, glorious ends upon my soul. It is my ignorance of God's design that makes me quarrel with him.' He says to thee in this case, as he did to Peter, "What *I* do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

2. Though God has reserved to himself a liberty of afflicting his people, yet he has tied up his own hands by promise never to take away his loving kindness from them. Can I contemplate this scripture with a repining, discontented spirit: "*I* will be his Father, and he shall be my son: if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of man, and with the stripes of the children of men

nevertheless my mercy shall not depart away from him.” O my heart, my haughty heart! dost thou well to be discontent, when God has given thee the whole tree, with all the clusters of comfort growing on it, because he suffers the wind to blow down a few leaves? Christians have two kinds of goods, the goods of the throne and the goods of the footstool; immoveables and moveables. If God has secured those, never let my heart be troubled at the loss of these: indeed, if he had cut off his love or discovenanted my soul; I had reason to be cast down; but this he hath not done, nor can he do it.

3. It is of great efficacy to keep the heart from sinking under afflictions, to call to mind that thine own Father has the ordering of them. Not a creature moves hand or tongue against thee but by his permission. Suppose the cup be bitter, yet it is the cup which thy Father hath given thee; and canst thou suspect poison to be in it? Foolish man, put home the case to thine own heart; canst thou give thy child that which would ruin him? No! thou wouldst as soon hurt thyself as him. “If thou then, being evil, knowest how to give good gifts to thy children,” how much more does God! The very consideration of his nature as a God of love, pity, and tender mercies; or of his relation to thee as a father, husband, friend, may be security enough, if he had not spoken a word to quiet thee in this case; and yet you have his word too, by the prophet Jeremiah: “I will do you no hurt.” You lie too near his heart for him to hurt you; nothing grieves him more than your groundless and unworthy suspicions of his designs. Would it not grieve a faithful, tender-hearted physician, when he had studied the case of his patient, and prepared the most excellent medicines to save his life, to hear him cry out, ‘O he has undone me! he has poisoned me!’ because it pains him in the operation?. O when will you be ingenuous?

4. God respects you as much in a low as in a high condition; and therefore it need not so much trouble you to be made low; nay, he manifests more of his love, grace and tenderness in the time of affliction than in the time of prosperity. As God did not at first choose you because you were high, he will not now forsake you because you are low. Men may look shy upon you, and alter their respects as your condition is altered; when Providence has blasted

your estate, your summer-friends may grow strange, fearing you may be troublesome to them; but will God do so? No, no: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." says he. If adversity and poverty could bar you from access to God, it were indeed a deplorable condition: but, so far from this, you may go to him as freely as ever. "My God will hear me," says the church. Poor David, when stripped of all earthly comforts, could encourage himself in the Lord his God; and why cannot you? Suppose your husband or son had lost all at sea, and should come to you in rags; could you deny the relation, or refuse to entertain him? If you would not, much less will God. Why then are you so troubled? Though your condition be changed, your Father's love is not changed.

5. What if by the loss of outward comforts God preserves your soul from the ruining power of temptation? Surely then you have little cause to sink your heart by such sad thoughts. Do not earthly enjoyments make men shrink and warp in times of trial? For the love of these many have forsaken Christ in such an hour. The young ruler "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." If this is God's design, how ungrateful to murmur against him for it! We see mariners in a storm can throw overboard the most valuable goods to preserve their lives. We know it is usual for soldiers in a besieged city to destroy the finest buildings without the walls in which the enemy may take shelter; and no one doubts that it is wisely done. Those who have mortified limbs willingly stretch them out to be cut off, and not only thank, but pay the surgeon. Must God be murmured against for casting over that which would sink you in a storm; for pulling down that which would assist your enemy in the siege of temptation; for cutting off what would endanger your everlasting life? O, inconsiderate, ungrateful man! are not these things for which thou grieveest, the very things that have ruined thousands of souls?

6. It would much support thy heart under adversity, to consider that God by such humbling providences maybe accomplishing that for which you have long prayed and waited. And should you be troubled at that? Say, Christian, hast thou not many prayers depending before God upon such accounts as these; that he would

keep thee from sin; discover to thee the emptiness of the creature; that he would mortify and kill thy lusts; that thy heart may never find rest in any enjoyment but Christ? By such humbling and impoverishing strokes God may be fulfilling thy desire.

Wouldst thou be kept from sin? *Lo, he hath hedged up thy way with thorns.* Wouldst thou see the creature's vanity? Thy affliction is a fair glass to discover it; for the vanity of the creature is never so effectually and sensibly discovered, as in our own experience. Wouldst thou have thy corruptions mortified? This is the way: to have the food and fuel removed that maintained them; for as prosperity begat and fed them, so adversity, when sanctified, is a means to kill them. Wouldst thou have thy heart rest no where but in the bosom of God? What better method could Providence take to accomplish thy desire than pulling from under thy head that soft pillow of creature-delights on which you rested before?

And yet you fret at this: peevish child, how dost thou try thy Father's patience! If he delay to answer thy prayers, thou art ready to say he regards thee not; if he does that which really answers the end of them, though not in the way which you expect, you murmur against him for that; as if, instead of answering, he were crossing all thy hopes and aims. Is this ingenuous? Is it not enough that God is so gracious as to do what thou desirest: must thou be so impudent as to expect him to do it in the way which thou prescribest?

7. It may support *thy* heart, to consider that in these troubles God is performing that work in which thy soul would rejoice, if thou didst see the design of it. We are clouded with much ignorance, and are not able to discern how particular providences tend to the fulfilment of God's designs; and therefore, like Israel in the wilderness, are often murmuring, because Providence leads us about in a howling desert, where we are exposed to difficulties; though then he led them, and is now leading us, *by the right way to a city of habitations.* If you could but see how God in his secret counsel has exactly laid the whole plan of your salvation, even to the smallest means and circumstances; could you but discern the admirable harmony of divine dispensations, their mutual relations, together with the general respect they all have to the last end; had

you liberty to make your own choice, you would, of all conditions in the world, choose that in which you now are. Providence is like a curious piece of tapestry made of a thousand shreds, which, single, appear useless, but put together, they represent a beautiful history to the eye. As God does all things according to the counsel of his own will, of course this is ordained as the best method to effect your salvation. *Such an one has a proud heart, so many humbling providences appoint for him; such an one has an earthly heart, see many impoverishing providences for him.* Did you but see this, I need say no more to support the most dejected heart.

8. It would much conduce to the settlement of your heart, to consider that by fretting and discontent you do yourself more injury than all your afflictions could do. Your own discontent is that which arms your troubles with a sting; you make your burden heavy by struggling under it. Did you but lie quietly under the hand of God, your condition would be much more easy than it is. "Impatience in the sick occasions severity in the physician." This makes God afflict the more, as a father a stubborn child that receives not correction. Beside, it unfits the soul to pray over its troubles, or receive the sense of that good which God intends by them. Affliction is a pill, which, being wrapt up in patience and quiet submission, may be easily swallowed; but discontent chews the pill, and so embitters the soul. God throws away some comfort which he saw would hurt you, and you will throw away your peace after it; he shoots an arrow which sticks in your clothes, and was never intended to hurt, but only to drive you from sin, and you will thrust it deeper, to the piercing of your very heart, by despondency and discontent.

9. If thy heart (like that of Rachel) still refuses to be comforted, then do one thing more: compare the condition thou art now in, and with which thou art so much dissatisfied, with the condition in which others are, and in which thou deservest to be. 'Others are roaring in flames, howling under the scourge of vengeance; and among them I deserve to be. O my soul is this hell? is my condition as bad as that of the damned? what would thousands now in hell give to exchange conditions with me!' I have read (says an author) that when the Duke of Conde had voluntarily subjected

himself to the inconveniences of poverty, he was one day observed and pitied by a lord of Italy, who from tenderness wished him to be more careful of his person. The good duke answered, "Sir, be not troubled, and think not that I suffer from want; for I send a harbinger before me, who makes ready my lodgings and takes care that I be royally entertained." The lord asked him who was his harbinger? He answered, "The knowledge of myself, and the consideration of what I deserve for my sins, which is eternal torment; when with this knowledge I arrive at my lodging, however unprovided I find it, methinks it is much better than I deserve. *Why doth the living man complain?*" Thus the heart may be kept from desponding or repining under adversity.

The *third season* calling for more than ordinary diligence to keep the heart is the time of *Zion's troubles*. When the Church, like the ship in which Christ and his disciples were, is oppressed and ready to perish in the waves of persecution, then good souls are ready to be shipwrecked too, upon the billows of their own fears. It is true, most men need the spur rather than the reins in this case; yet some men sit down discouraged under a sense of the Church's troubles. The loss of the ark cost Eli his life; the sad posture in which Jerusalem lay made good Nehemiah's countenance change in the midst of all the pleasures and accommodations of the court. But though God allows, yea, commands the most awakened apprehensions of these calamities, and in "such a day calls to mourning, weeping, and girding with sackcloth," and severely threatens the insensible; yet it will not please him to see you sit like pensive Elijah under the juniper tree. "Ah, Lord God! it is enough, take away my life also." No: a mourner in Zion you may and ought to be, but a self-tormentor you must not *be*; complain *to* God you may, but complain *of* God (though but by the language of your actions) you must not.

Now let us inquire how tender hearts may be relieved and supported, when they are even overwhelmed with the burdensome sense of Zion's troubles? I grant it is hard for him who preferreth Zion to his chief joy, to keep his heart that it sink not below the due sense of its troubles; yet this ought to, and may be done, by

the use of such heart-establishing directions as these:

1. Settle this great truth in your heart, that no trouble befalls Zion but by the permission of Zion's God; and he permits nothing out of which he will not ultimately bring much good to his people. Comfort may be derived from reflections on the permitting as well as on the commanding will of God. "Let him alone, it may be God hath bidden him." "Thou couldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above." It should much calm our spirits, that it is the will of God to suffer it; and that, had he not suffered it, it could, never have been as it is. This very consideration quieted Job, Eli, David, and Hezekiah. That the Lord did it was enough to them: and why should it not be so to us? If the Lord will have Zion ploughed as a field, and her goodly stones lie in the dust; if it be his pleasure that Anti-Christ shall rage yet longer and wear out the saints of the Most High; if it be his will that a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord God of Hosts, shall be upon the valley of vision, that the wicked shall devour the man that is more righteous than he; what are we that we should contend with God?

It is fit that we should be resigned to that Will whence we proceeded, and that He that made us should dispose of us as he pleases: he may do what seemeth him good without our consent. Doth poor man stand upon equal ground, that he may capitulate with his Creator; or that God should render him an account of any of his matters? That we be content, however God may dispose of us, is as reasonable as that we be obedient, whatever he may require of us. But if we pursue this argument farther, and consider that God's permissions all meet at last in the real good of his people, this will much more quiet our spirits. Do the enemies carry away the best among the people into captivity? This looks like a distressing providence; but God sends them thither for their good. Does God take the Assyrian as a staff in his hand to beat his people with?

The end of his so doing is, "that he may accomplish his whole work upon Mount Zion." If God can bring much good out of the greatest evil of sin, much more out of temporal afflictions; and that he will, is as evident as that he can do so. For it is inconsistent with

the wisdom of a common agent to permit anything (which he might prevent if he pleased) to cross his great design; and can it be imagined that the most wise God should do so? As, then, Luther said to Melancthon, so say I to you: “Let infinite wisdom, power and love alone” for by these all creatures are swayed, and all actions guided, in reference to the church. It is not our work to rule the world, but to submit to Him that does. The motions of Providence are all judicious, the wheels are full of eyes: it is enough that the affairs of Zion are in a good hand.

2. Ponder this heart-supporting truth: how many troubles soever are upon Zion, yet her King is in her. What! hath the Lord forsaken his churches? has he sold them into the enemy’s hands? Does he not regard what evil befalls them that our hearts sink thus? Is it not shamefully undervaluing the great God, and too much magnifying poor impotent man, to fear and tremble at creatures while God is in the midst of us? The church’s enemies are many and mighty: let that be granted, yet that argument with which Caleb and Joshua strove to raise their own hearts, is of as much force now as it was then: “The Lord is with, us, fear them not.” A historian tells us, that when Antigonus overheard his soldiers reckoning how many their enemies were, and so discouraging one another, he suddenly stepped in among them with this question, “And how many do you reckon me for?” Discouraged souls, how many do you reckon the Lord for? Is he not an overmatch for all his enemies? Is not *one Almighty* more than *many mighties*? “If God be for us, who can be against us?” What think you was the reason of that great examination Gideon made? He questions, he desires a sign, and after that, another: and what was the end of all this, but that he might be sure the Lord was with him, and that he might but write this motto upon his ensign: *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon*. So if you can be well assured the Lord is with his people, you will thereby rise above all your discouragements: and that he is so, you need not require a sign from heaven; lo, you have a sign before you, even their marvellous preservation amidst all their enemies. If God be not with his people, how is it that they are not swallowed up quickly? Do their enemies want malice, power, or opportunity? No, but there is an invisible hand upon them. Let then his presence

give us rest; and though the mountains be hurled into the sea, though heaven and earth mingle together, fear not; God is in the midst of Zion, she shall not be moved.

3. Consider the great advantages attending the people of God in an afflicted condition. If a low and an afflicted state in the world be really best for the church, then your dejection is not only irrational, but ungrateful. Indeed if you estimate the happiness of the church by its worldly ease, splendour and prosperity, then such times of affliction will appear to be unfavourable; but if you reckon its glory to consist in its humility, faith, and heavenly-mindedness, no condition so much abounds with advantages for these as an afflicted condition. It was not persecutions and prisons, but worldliness and wantonness that poisoned the church: neither was it the earthly glory of its professors, but the blood of its martyrs that was the seed of the church. The power of godliness did never thrive better than in affliction, and was never less thriving than in times of greatest prosperity: when “we are left a poor and an afflicted people, then we learn to trust in the name of the Lord.”

It is indeed for the saints’ advantage to be weaned from love of, and delight in, ensnaring earthly vanities; to be quickened and urged forward with more haste to heaven; to have clearer discoveries of their own hearts; to be taught to pray more fervently, frequently, spiritually; to look and long for the rest to come more ardently. If these be for their advantage, experience teaches us that no condition is ordinarily blessed with such fruits as these, like an afflicted condition. Is it well then to repine and droop, because your Father consults the advantage of your soul rather than the gratification of your humours? because he will bring you to heaven by a nearer way than you are willing to go? Is this a due requital of his love, who is pleased so much to concern himself in your welfare—who does more for you than he will do for thousands in the world, upon whom he will not lay a rod, dispense an affliction to them for their good? But alas! we judge by sense, and reckon things good or evil, according to our present taste.

4. Take heed that you overlook not the many precious mercies which the people of God enjoy amidst all their trouble. It is a pity that our tears on account of our troubles should so blind our eyes

that we should not see our mercies. I will not insist upon the mercy of having your life given you for a prey; nor upon the many outward comforts which you enjoy, even above what were enjoyed by Christ and his precious servants, of whom the world was not worthy. But what say you to pardon of sin; interest in Christ; the covenant of promise; and an eternity of happiness in the presence of God, after a few days are over? O that a people entitled to such mercies as these should droop under any temporal affliction, or be so much concerned for the frowns of men and the loss of trifles. You have not the smiles of great men, but you have the favour of the great God; you are perhaps diminished in temporal, but you are thereby increased in spiritual and eternal goods. You cannot live so plentifully as before; but you may live as heavenly as ever. Will you grieve so much for these circumstances as to forget your substance? Shall light troubles make you forget weighty mercies? Remember the true riches of the church are laid out of the reach of all enemies. What though God do not in his outward dispensations distinguish between his own and others? Yea, what though his judgments single out the best, and spare the worst? What though an Abel be killed in love, and a Cain survive in hatred; a bloody Dionysius die in his bed, and a good Josiah fall in battle? What though the belly of the wicked be filled with hidden treasures, and the teeth of the saints with gravel-stones? Still there is much matter of praise; for *electing love* has distinguished, though *common providence* has not: and while prosperity and impunity slay the wicked, even slaying and adversity shall benefit and save the righteous.

5. Believe that how low soever the church be plunged under the waters of adversity, she shall assuredly rise again. Fear not; for as surely as Christ arose the third day, notwithstanding the seal and watch upon him; so surely Zion shall arise out of all her troubles, and lift up her victorious head over all her enemies. There is no reason to fear the ruin of that people who thrive by their losses and multiply by being diminished. Be not too hasty to bury the church before she is dead; stay till Christ has tried his skill, before you give her up for lost. The bush may be all in a flame, but shall never be consumed; and that because of the good will of Him that

dwelleth in it.

6. Remember the instances of God's care and tenderness over his people in former difficulties. For above eighteen hundred years the Christian church has been in affliction, and yet it is not consumed; many a wave of persecution has gone over it, yet it is not drowned; many devices have been formed against it, hitherto none of them has prospered. This is not the first time that Hamans and Ahithophels have plotted its ruin; that a Herod has stretched out his hand to vex it; still it has been preserved from, supported under, or delivered out of all its troubles. Is it not as dear to God as ever? Is he not as able to save it now as formerly? Though we know not whence deliverance should arise, "yet the Lord knoweth how *to* deliver the godly out of temptations."

7. If you can derive no comfort from any of these considerations, try to draw some out of your very trouble. Surely this trouble of yours is a good *evidence* of your integrity. Union is the ground of sympathy: if you had not some rich, adventure in that ship, you would not tremble as you do when it is in danger. Beside this framer of spirit may afford you this consolation, that if you are so sensible of Zion's trouble, Jesus Christ is much more sensible of and solicitous about it than you can be, and he will have an eye of favour upon them that mourn for it.

The *fourth season*, requiring, our utmost diligence to keep our hearts, is the time of *danger and public distraction*. In such times the best hearts are too apt to be surprised by slavish fear. If Syria be confederate with Ephraim, how do the hearts of the house of David shake, even as the trees of the wood which are shaken with the wind. When there are ominous signs in the heavens, or the distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; then the hearts of men fail for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. Even a Paul may sometimes complain of "fightings within, when there are fears without."

But, my brethren, these things ought not so to be; saints should be of a more elevated spirit; so was David when his heart was kept in a good frame: "The Lord is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be

afraid?” Let none but the servants of sin be the slaves of fear; let them that have delighted in evil fear evil. Let not that which God has threatened as a judgment upon the wicked, ever seize upon the hearts of the righteous. “I will send faintness into their hearts in the land of their enemies, and the sound of a shaking leaf shall chase them.” What poor spirited men are those, to fly at a shaking leaf! A leaf makes a pleasant, not a terrible noise; it makes indeed a kind of natural music: but to a guilty conscience even the whistling leaves are drums and trumpets!

“But God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of love and of a sound mind.” A *sound mind*, as it stands there in opposition to *fear*, is an unwounded conscience not weakened by guilt: and this should make a man as bold as a lion. I know it cannot be said of a saint, as God said of *leviathan*, that he is made without fear; there is a natural fear in every man, and it is as impossible to remove it wholly, as to remove the body itself. Fear is perturbation of the mind, arising from the apprehension of approaching danger; and as long as dangers can approach us, we shall find some perturbations within us. It is not my purpose to commend to you a stoical apathy, nor yet to dissuade you from such a degree of cautionary preventive fear as may fit you for trouble and be serviceable to your soul. There is a provident fear that opens our eyes to foresee danger, and quickens us to a prudent and lawful use of means to prevent it: such was Jacob’s fear, and such his prudence when expecting to meet his angry brother Esau. But it is the fear of diffidence, from which I would persuade you to keep your heart; that tyrannical passion which invades the heart in times of danger, distracts, weakens and unfits it for duty, drives men upon unlawful means, and brings a snare with it.

Now let us inquire how a Christian may keep his heart from distracting and tormenting fears in times of great and threatening dangers. There are several excellent rules for keeping the heart from sinful fear when imminent dangers threaten us:

1. Look upon all creatures as in the hand of God, who manages them in all their motions, limiting, restraining and determining them at his pleasure. Get this great truth well settled by faith in your heart, and it will guard you against slavish fears. The first

chapter of Ezekiel contains an admirable draught of Providence: there you see the living creatures who move the wheels (that is, the great revolutions of things here below) coming unto Christ, who sits upon the throne, to receive new instructions from him. In Revelations, 6th chapter, you read of white, black, and red horses, which are but the instruments God employs in executing judgments in the world, as wars, pestilence, and death. When these horses are prancing and trampling up and down in the world, here is a consideration that may quiet our hearts; God has the reins in his hand. Wicked men are sometimes like mad horses, they would stamp the people of God under their feet, but that the bridle of Providence is in their mouths. A lion at liberty is terrible to meet, but who is afraid of a lion in the keeper's hand?

2. Remember that this God in whose hand are all creatures, is your Father, and is much more tender of you than you are, or can be, of yourself. "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." Let me ask the most timorous woman whether there be not a great difference between the sight of a drawn sword in the hand of a bloody ruffian, and of the same sword in the hand of her own tender husband? As great a difference there is between looking upon creatures by an eye of sense, and looking on them, as in the hand of your God, by an eye of faith. Isaiah, 54: 5, is here very appropriate: "Thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name;" he is Lord of all the hosts of creatures. Who would be afraid to pass through an army, though all the soldiers should turn their swords and guns toward him, if the commander of that army were his friend or father? A religious young man being at sea with many other passengers in a great storm, and they being half dead with fear, he only was observed to be very cheerful, as if he were but little concerned in that danger: one of them demanding the reason of his cheerfulness, "O," said he, "it is because the pilot of the ship is my Father!" Consider Christ first as the King and supreme Lord over the providential kingdom, and then as your head, husband and friend, and you will quickly say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." This truth will make you cease trembling, and cause you to sing in the midst of danger, "The Lord is King of all the earth, sing ye praise with understanding." That is, 'Let every

one that has understanding of this heart-reviving and establishing doctrine of the dominion of our Father over all creatures, sing praise.’

3. Urge upon your heart the express prohibitions of Christ in this case, and let your heart stand in awe of the violation of them. He hath charged you not to fear: “When we shall hear of wars and commotions, see that ye be not terrified.” “In nothing be terrified by your adversaries.” In Matthew, tenth, and within the compass of six verses, our Saviour commands us thrice, “not to fear man.” Does the voice of a man make thee to tremble, and shall not the voice of God? If thou art of such a timorous spirit, how is it that thou fearest not to disobey the commands of Jesus Christ? Methinks the command of Christ should have as much power to calm, as the voice of a poor worm to terrify thy heart. “I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as the grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?” We cannot fear creatures sinfully till we have forgotten God: did we remember what he is, and what he has said, we should not be of such feeble spirits. Bring thyself then to this reflection in times of danger: ‘If I let into my heart the slavish fear of man, I must let out the reverential awe and fear of God; and dare I cast off the fear of the Almighty for the frowns of a man? Shall I lift up proud dust above the great God? Shall I run upon a certain sin, to shun a probable danger?’ O keep thy heart by this consideration!

4. Remember how much needless trouble your vain fears have brought upon you formerly: “And hast feared continually because of the oppressor, as if he were ready to devour; and where is the fury of the oppressor?” He seemed ready to devour, yet you are not devoured. I have not brought upon you the thing that you feared; you have wasted your spirit, disordered your soul, and weakened your hands to no purpose: you might have all this while enjoyed your peace, and possessed your soul in patience. And here I cannot but observe a very deep policy of Satan in managing a design against the soul by these vain fears. I call them vain, with reference to the frustration of them by Providence; but certainly they are not in vain as the end at which Satan aims in raising them; for herein

he acts as soldiers do in the siege of a garrison, who to wear out the besieged by constant watchings, and thereby unfit them to make resistance when they storm it in earnest, every night rouse them with false alarms, which though they come to nothing yet remarkably answer the ultimate design of the enemy. O when will you beware of Satan's devices?

5. Consider solemnly, that though the things you fear should really happen, yet there is more evil in your own fear than in the things feared: and that, not only as the least evil of sin is worse than the greatest evil of suffering; but as this sinful fear has really more trouble in it than there is in that condition of which you are so much afraid. Fear is both a multiplying and a tormenting passion; it represents troubles as much greater than they are, and so tortures the soul much more than the suffering itself.

So it was with Israel at the Red Sea; they cried out and were afraid, till they stepped into the water, and then a passage was opened through those waters which they thought would have drowned them. Thus it is with us; we looking through the glass of carnal fear upon the waters of trouble, the swellings of Jordan, cry out, 'O they are unfordable; we must perish in them!' But when we come into the midst of those floods indeed, we find the promise made good: "God will make a way to escape." Thus it was with a blessed martyr; when he would make a trial by putting his finger to the candle, and found himself not able to endure that, he cried out, "What! cannot I bear the burning of a finger? How then shall I be able to bear the burning of my whole body to-morrow?" Yet when that morrow came he could go cheerfully into the flames with this scripture in his mouth: "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine; when thou passest through the waters I will be with you; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt."

6. Consult the many precious promises which are written for your support and comfort in all dangers. These are your refuges to which you may fly and be safe when the arrows of danger fly by night, and destruction wasteth at noon-day. There are particular promises suited to particular cases and exigencies; there are also general promises reaching all cases and conditions. Such as these:

“All things shall work together for good,” &c. “Though a sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged, yet it shall be well with them that fear the Lord,” &c. Could you but believe the promises your heart should be established. Could you but plead them with God as Jacob did, (“Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good,” &c.) they would relieve you in every distress.

7. Quiet your trembling heart by recording and consulting your past experiences of the care and faithfulness of God in former distresses. These experiences are food for your faith in a wilderness. By this David kept his heart in time of danger, and Paul his. It was answered by a saint, when one told him that his enemies waylaid him to take his life: “If God take no care of me, how is it that I have escaped hitherto?” You may plead with God old experiences for new ones: for it is in pleading with God for new deliverances, as it is in pleading for new pardons. Mark how Moses pleads of that account with God. “Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, as thou hast forgiven them from Egypt until now.” He does not say as men do, ‘Lord, this is the first fault, thou hast not been troubled before to sign their pardon:’ but, ‘Lord, because thou hast pardoned them so often, I beseech thee pardon them once again.’ So in new difficulties let the saint say, ‘Lord, thou hast often heard, helped and saved, in former years; therefore now help again, for with thee there is plenteous redemption and thine arm is not shortened.’

8. Be well satisfied that you are in the way of your duty, and that will beget holy courage in times of danger. “Who, will harm you if you be a follower of that which is good?” Or if any dare attempt to harm you, “you may boldly commit yourself to God in well-doing.” It was this consideration that raised Luther’s spirit above all fear: “in the cause of God (said he) I ever am, and ever shall be stout: herein I assume this title, I yield to none.” A good cause will bear up a man’s spirit. Hear the saying of a heathen, to the shame of cowardly Christians: when the emperor Vespasian had commanded Fluidus Priseus not to come to the senate, or if he did come, to speak nothing but what he would have him; the senator returned this noble answer, “that he was a senator, it was fit he should be at the senate; and if being there, he were required to give

his advice, he would freely speak that which his conscience commanded him.” The emperor threatening that then he should die; he answered, “Did I ever tell you that I was immortal? Do what you will, and I will do what I ought. It is in your power to put me to death unjustly, and in my power to die with constancy.” Righteousness is a breastplate: let them tremble whom danger finds out of the way of duty.

9. Get your conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ from all guilt, and that will set your heart above all fear. It is guilt upon the conscience that softens and makes cowards of our spirits: “the righteous are bold as a lion.” It was guilt in Cain’s conscience that made him cry, “Every one that findeth me will slay me.” A guilty conscience is more terrified by imagined dangers, than a pure conscience is by real ones. A guilty sinner carries a witness against himself in his own bosom. It was guilty Herod cried out, “John Baptist is risen from the dead.” Such a conscience is the devil’s anvil, on which he fabricates all those swords and spears with which the guilty sinner pierces himself. Guilt is to danger, what fire is to gun-powder: a man need not fear to walk among many barrels of powder, if he have no fire about him.

10. Exercise holy trust in times of great distress. Make it your business to trust God with your life and comforts, and then your heart will be at rest about them. So did David, “At what time I am afraid I will trust in thee;” that is, ‘Lord, if at any time a storm arise, I will shelter from it under the covert of thy wings.’ Go to God by acts of faith and trust, and never doubt that he will secure you. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee,” says Isaiah. God is pleased when you come to him thus: ‘Father, my life, my liberty and my estate are exposed, and I cannot secure them; O let me leave them in, thy hand. *The poor leaveth himself with thee;* and does his God fail him? No, *thou art the helper of the fatherless:* that is, thou art the helper of the destitute one, that has none to go to but God. This is a comforting passage, “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord;” he does not say, his ear shall be preserved from the report of evil tidings, he may hear as sad tidings as other men, but his heart shall be kept from the terror of

those tidings; his heart is fixed.

11. Consult the honour of religion more, and your personal safety less. Is it for the honour of religion (think you) that Christians should be as timorous as bores to start at every sound? Will not this tempt the world to think, that whatever you talk, yet your principles are no better than other men's? What mischief may the discovery of your fears before them do! It was nobly said by Nehemiah, "Should such a man as I flee? and who, being as I am, would flee?" Were it not better you should die than that the world should be prejudiced against Christ by your example? For alas! how apt is the world (who judge more by what they see in your practices than by what they understand of your principles) to conclude from your timidity, that how much soever you commend faith and talk of assurance, yet you dare trust to those things no more than they, when it comes to the trial. O let not your fears lay such a stumbling-block before the blind world.

12. He that would secure his heart from fear, must first secure the eternal interest of his soul in the hands of Jesus Christ. When this is done, you may say, 'Now, world, do thy worst!' You will not be very solicitous about a vile body, when you are once assured it shall be well to all eternity with your precious soul. "Fear not them (says Christ) that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." The assured Christian may smile with contempt upon all his enemies, and say, 'Is this the worst that you can do?' What say you, Christian? Are you assured that your soul is safe; that within a few moments of your dissolution it shall be received by Christ into an everlasting habitation? If you be sure of that, never trouble yourself about the instrument and means of your death.'

13. Learn to quench all slavish creature-fears in the reverential fear of God. This is a cure by diversion. *It* is an exercise of Christian wisdom to turn those passions of the soul which most predominate, into spiritual channels; to turn natural anger into spiritual zeal, natural mirth into holy cheerfulness, and natural fear into a holy dread and awe of God. This method of cure Christ prescribes in the 10th of Matthew; similar to which is Isaiah, 8:12, 13, "Fear not their fear." 'But how shall we help it?' "Sanctify the

Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” Natural fear may be allayed for the present by natural reason, or the removal of the occasion; but then it is like a candle blown out by a puff of breath, which is easily blown in again: but if the fear of God extinguish it, then it is like a candle quenched in water, which cannot easily be rekindled.’

14. Pour out to God in prayer those fears which the devil and your own unbelief pour in upon you in times of danger. Prayer is the best outlet to fear: where is the Christian that cannot set his seal to this direction? I will give you the greatest example to encourage you to compliance, even the example of Jesus Christ. When the hour of his danger and death drew nigh, he went into the garden, separated from his disciples, and there wrestled mightily with God in prayer, even unto agony; in reference to which the apostle says, “who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong cries and tears, to him that was able to save from death, and was heard in that he feared.” He was heard as to strength and support to carry him through it; though not as to deliverance, or exemption from it. O that these things may abide with you, and be reduced to practice in these evil days, and that many trembling souls may be established by them.

The first of two booklets.

