



Keeping the Heart

Part Two

*“Keep thy heart
with all diligence,
for out of it are
the issues of life”*
Proverbs 4:23.

John Flavel

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The *fifth season*, requiring diligence in keeping the heart, is the time of *outward wants*. Although at such times we should complain to God, not of God, (the throne of grace being erected for a “time of need,”) yet when the waters of relief run low, and want begins to press, how prone are the best hearts to distrust the fountain! When the meal in the barrel and the oil in the cruse are almost spent, our faith and patience too are almost spent. It is now difficult to keep the proud and unbelieving heart in a holy quietude and sweet submission at the foot of God. It is an easy thing to talk of trusting God for daily bread, while we have a full barn or purse; but to say as the prophet, “Though the fig-tree should not blossom, neither fruit be in the vine, &c. yet will I rejoice in the Lord:” surely this is not easy.

Would you know then how a Christian may keep his heart from distrusting God, or repining against him, when outward wants are either felt or feared? The case deserves to be seriously considered, especially now, since it seems to be the design of Providence to empty the people of God of their creature fullness, and acquaint them with those difficulties to which hitherto they have been altogether strangers. To secure the heart from the dangers attending this condition, these considerations may, through the blessing of the Spirit, prove effectual:

1. If God reduces you to necessities, he therein deals no otherwise with you than he has done with some of the holiest men that ever lived. Your condition is not singular; though you have hitherto been a stranger to want, other saints have been familiarly acquainted with it. Hear what Paul says, not of himself only, but in the name of other saints reduced to like exigencies: “Even to the present hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place.” To see such a man as *Paul* going up and down the world naked, and hungry, and houseless; one that was so far above thee in grace and holiness; one that did more service for God in a day than perhaps thou hast done in all thy days may well put an end to your repining. Have you

forgotten how much even a David has suffered? How great were his difficulties! “Give, I pray thee,” says he to Nabal, “whatsoever cometh to thy hand, to thy servants, and to thy son David.” But why speak I of these? Behold a greater than any of them, even the Son of God, *who is the heir of all things, and by whom the worlds were made*, sometimes would have been glad of any thing, having nothing to eat. “And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry; and seeing a fig-tree, afar off, having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon.”

Hereby then God has set no mark of hatred upon you, neither can you infer want of *love* from want of *bread*. When thy repining heart puts the question, ‘Was there ever sorrow like unto mine?’ ask these worthies, and they will tell thee that though they did not complain as thou dost, yet their condition was as necessitous as thine is.

2. If God leave you not in this condition without a promise, you have no reason to repine or despond under it. That is a sad condition indeed to which no promise belongs. Calvin in his comment on Isaiah, 9:1, explains in what sense the darkness of the captivity was not so great as that of the lesser incursions made by Tiglath Pileser. In the captivity, the city was destroyed and the temple burnt with fire: there was no comparison in the *affliction*, yet the *darkness* was not so great, because, says he, “there was a certain *promise* made in this case, but none in the other.” It is better to be as low as hell *with* a promise, than to be in paradise *without* one. Even the darkness of hell itself would be no darkness comparatively at all, were there but a promise to enlighten it. Now, God has left many sweet promises for the faith of his poor people to live upon in this condition; such as these: “O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him; the lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing.” “The eye of the Lord is upon the righteous to keep them alive in famine.” “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” “When the poor and the needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear

them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.” Here you see their extreme wants, water being put for their necessities of life; and their certain relief, “I the Lord will hear them;” in which it is supposed that they cry unto him in their distress, and he hears their cry. Having therefore these promises, why should not your distrustful heart conclude like David’s, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want?”

‘But these promises imply conditions: if they were absolute, they would afford more satisfaction.’ What are those tacit conditions of which you speak but these, that he will either supply or sanctify your wants; that you shall have so much as God sees fit for you? And does this trouble you? Would you have the mercy, whether sanctified or not? whether God sees it fit for you or not? The appetites of saints after earthly things should not be so ravenous as to seize greedily upon any enjoyment without regarding circumstances.

‘But when wants press, and I see not whence supplies should come, my faith in the promise shakes, and I, like murmuring Israel, cry, “He gave bread, can he give water also?” O unbelieving heart! when did his promises fail? who ever trusted them and was ashamed? May not God upbraid thee with thine unreasonable infidelity, as in Jer. 2:31, “Have I been a wilderness unto you?” or as Christ said to his disciples, “Since I was with you, lacked ye any thing?” Yea, may you not upbraid yourself; may you not say with good old Polycarp, “These many years I have served Christ, and found him a good Master?”’

Indeed he may deny what your *wantonness*, but not what your *want* calls for. He will not regard the cry of your *lusts*, nor yet despise the cry of your *faith*: though he will not indulge your *wanton appetites*, yet he will not violate his own *faithful promises*. These promises are your best security for *eternal life*; and it is strange they should not satisfy you for *daily bread*. Remember the words of the Lord, and solace your heart with them amidst all your wants. It is said of Epicurus, that in dreadful paroxysms of the cholic he often refreshed himself by calling to mind his inventions in philosophy; and of Possodonius the philosopher, that in an acute disorder he solaced himself with discourses on moral virtue; and

when distressed, he would say, “O pain, thou dost nothing; though thou art a little troublesome, I will never confess thee to be evil.” If upon such grounds as these they could support themselves under such racking pains, and even deluded their diseases by them; how much rather should the promises of God, and the sweet experiences which have gone along step by step with them, make you forget all your wants, and comfort you in every difficulty?

3. If it be bad now, it might have been worse. Has God denied thee the comforts of this life? He might have denied thee Christ, peace, and pardon also; and then thy case had been woeful indeed.

You know God has done so to millions. How many such wretched objects may your eyes behold every day, that have no comfort in hand, nor yet in hope; that are miserable here, and will be so to eternity; that have a bitter cup, and nothing to sweeten it—no, not so much as any hope that it will be better. But it is not so with you: though you be poor in this world, yet you are “rich in faith, and an heir of the kingdom which God has promised.” Learn to set spiritual riches over against temporal poverty. Balance all your present troubles with your spiritual privileges. Indeed if God has denied your soul the robe of righteousness to *clothe* it, the hidden manna to *feed* it, the heavenly mansion to *receive* it, you might well be pensive; but the consideration that he has not may administer comfort under any outward distress. When Luther began to be pressed by want, he said, “Let us be contented with our hard fare; for do not we feast upon Christ, the bread of life?” “Blessed be God (said Paul) who hath abounded to us in all spiritual blessings.”

4. Though this affliction be great, God has far greater, with which he chastises the dearly beloved of his soul in this world. Should he remove this and inflict those, you would account your present state a very comfortable one, and bless God to be as you now are. Should God remove your present troubles, supply all your outward wants, give you the desire of your heart in creature-comforts; but hide his face from you, shoot his arrows into your soul, and cause the venom of them to drink up your spirit: should he leave you but a few days to the buffetings of Satan: should he hold your eyes but a few nights waking with horrors of conscience,

tossing to and fro till the dawning of the day:—should he lead you through the chambers of death, show you the visions of darkness, and make his terrors set themselves in array against you: then tell me if you would not think it a great mercy to be back again in your former necessitous condition, with peace of conscience; and account bread and water, with God’s favour, a happy state? O then take heed of repining. Say not that God deals hardly with you, lest you provoke him to convince you by your own sense that he has worse rods than these for unsubmissive and froward children.

5. If it be bad now, it will be better shortly. Keep thy heart by this consideration, ‘the meal in the barrel is almost spent; well, be it so, why should that trouble me, if I am almost beyond the need and use of these things?’ The traveller has spent almost all his money; ‘well,’ says he, ‘though my money be almost spent, my journey is almost finished too: I am near home, and shall soon be fully supplied.’ If there be no candles in the house, it is a comfort to think that it is almost day, and then there will be no need of them. I am afraid, Christian, you misreckon when you think your provision is almost spent, and you have a great way to travel, many years to live and nothing to live upon; it may be not half so many, as you suppose. In this be confident, if your provision be spent, either fresh supplies are coining, though you see not whence, or you are nearer your journey’s end than you reckon yourself to be. Desponding soul, does it become a man travelling upon the road to that heavenly city, and almost arrived there, within a few days’ journey of his Father’s house, where all his wants shall be supplied, to be so anxious about a little meat, or drink, or clothes, which he fears he shall want by the way? It was nobly said by the forty martyrs when turned out naked in a frosty night to be starved to death, “The winter indeed is sharp and cold, but heaven is warm and comfortable; here we shiver for cold, but Abraham’s bosom will make amends for all.”

‘But,’ says the desponding soul, ‘I may die for want.’ Who ever did so? When were the righteous forsaken? If indeed it be so, your journey is ended, and you fully supplied.

‘But I am not sure of that; were I sure of heaven, it would be another matter.’ Are you not sure of that? then you have other

matters to trouble yourself about than these; methinks these should be the least of all your cares. I do not find that souls perplexed about the want of Christ, pardon of sin, &c. are usually very solicitous about these things. He that seriously puts such questions as these, ‘What shall I do to be saved? how shall I know my sin is pardoned?’ does not trouble himself with, “What shall I eat, what shall I drink, or wherewithal shall I be clothed?”

6. Does it become the children of such a Father to distrust his all-sufficiency, or repine at any of his dispensations? Do you well to question his care and love upon every new exigency? Say, have you not formerly been ashamed of this? Has not your Father’s seasonable provision for you in former difficulties put you to the blush, and made you resolve never more to question his love and care? And yet will you again renew your unworthy suspicions of him? Disingenuous child! reason thus with yourself: “If I perish for want of what is good and needful for me, it must be either because my Father knows not my wants, or has not wherewith to supply them, or regards not what becomes of me. Which of these shall I charge upon him? Not the first: for my *Father knows what I have need of* not the second: for *the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; his name is God All-sufficient*. Not the last: for *as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; the Lord is exceeding pitiful and of tender mercy; he hears the young ravens when they cry*:—and will he not hear me? Consider, says Christ, *the fowls of the air*; not the fowls at the door, that are fed every day by hand, but the fowls of the air that have none to provide for them. Does he feed and clothe his enemies, and will he forget his children? he heard even the cry of Ishmael in distress. O my unbelieving heart, dost thou yet doubt?”

7. Your poverty is not your sin, but your affliction. If you have not by sinful means brought it upon yourself, and if it be but an affliction, it may the more easily be borne. It is hard indeed to bear an affliction coming upon us as the fruit and punishment of sin. When men are under trouble upon that account; they say, ‘O if it were but a single affliction, coming from the hand of God by way of trial, I could bear it; but I have brought it upon myself by sin, it comes as the punishment of sin; the marks of God’s displeasure are

upon it: it is the guilt within that troubles and galls more than the want without.' But it is not so here; therefore you have no reason to be cast down under it.

'But though there be no sting of guilt, yet this condition wants not other stings; as, for instance, The discredit of religion. I cannot comply with my engagements in the world, and thereby religion is likely to suffer.' It is well you have a heart to discharge every duty; yet if God disable you by providence, it is no discredit to your profession that you do not that which you cannot do, so long as it is your desire and endeavour to do what you can and ought to do; and in this case God's will is, that lenity and forbearance be toward you.

'But it grieves me to behold the necessities of others, whom I was wont to relieve and refresh, but now cannot.' If you cannot, it ceases to be your duty, and God accepts the drawing out of your soul to the hungry in compassion and desire to help them, though you cannot draw forth a full purse to relieve and supply them.

'But I find such a condition full of temptations, a great hinderance in the way to heaven.' Every condition in the world has its hinderances and attending temptations; and were you in a prosperous condition, you might there meet with more temptations and fewer advantages than you now have; for though I confess poverty as well as prosperity has its temptations, yet I am confident prosperity has not those advantages that poverty has. Here you have an opportunity to discover the sincerity of your love to God, when you can live upon him, find enough in him, and constantly follow him, even when all external inducements and motives fail.

Thus I have shown you how to keep your heart from the temptations and dangers attending a low condition in the world. When want oppresses and the heart begins to sink, then improve, and bless God for these helps to keep it.

The *sixth season* requiring this diligence in keeping the heart, is the *season of duty*. Our hearts must be closely watched and kept when we draw nigh to God in public, private, or secret duties; for the vanity of the heart seldom discovers itself more than at such times. How often does the poor soul cry out, 'O Lord, how gladly

would I serve thee, but vain thoughts will not let me: I come to open my heart to thee, to delight my soul in communion with thee, but my corruptions oppose me: Lord, call off these vain thoughts, and suffer them not to estrange the soul that is espoused to thee.’

The question then is this: How may the heart be kept from distractions by vain thoughts in time of duty? There is a two-fold distraction, or wandering of the heart in duty: First, voluntary and habitual, “They set not their hearts aright, and their spirit was not steadfast with God.” This is the case of formalists, and it proceeds from the want of a holy inclination of the heart to God; their hearts are under the power of their lusts, and therefore it is no wonder that they go after their lusts, even when they are about holy things. Secondly, involuntary and lamented distractions: “I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me; O wretched man that I am,” &c. This proceeds not from the want of a holy inclination or aim, but from the weakness of grace and the want of vigilance in opposing indwelling sin. But it is not my business to show you how these distractions come into the heart but rather how to get them out, and prevent their future admission:

1. Sequester yourself from all earthly employments, and set apart some time for solemn preparation to meet God in duty. You cannot come directly from the world into God’s presence without finding a savour of the world in your duties. It is with the heart (a few minutes since plunged in the world, now in the presence of God) as it is with the sea after a storm, which still continues working, muddy and disquiet, though the wind be laid and the storm be over. Your heart must have some time to settle. Few musicians can take an instrument and play upon it without some time and labour to tune it; few Christians can say with David, “My heart is fixed, O God, it is fixed.” When you go to God in any duty, take your heart aside and say, ‘O my soul, I am now engaged in the greatest work that a creature was ever employed about; I am going into the awful presence of God upon business of everlasting moment. O my soul, leave trifling now; be composed, be watchful, be serious; this is no common work, it is soul-work; it is work for eternity; it is work which will bring forth fruit to life or death in the world to come.’ Pause awhile and consider your sins, your wants, your troubles;

keep your thoughts awhile on these before you address yourself to duty. David first mused, and then spake with his tongue.

2. Having composed your heart by previous meditation, immediately set a guard upon your senses. How often are Christians in danger of losing the eyes of their mind by those of their body! Against this David prayed, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way." This may serve to expound the Arabian proverb: "Shut the windows that the house may be light." It were well if you could say in the commencement, as a holy man once said when he came from the performance of duty: "Be shut, O my eyes, be shut; for it is impossible that you should ever discern such beauty and glory in any creature as I have now seen in God." You must avoid all occasions of distraction from without, and imbibe that intensesness of spirit in the work of God which locks up the eye and ear against vanity.

3. Beg of God a mortified fancy. A working fancy, (saith one,) how much soever it be extolled among men, is a great snare to the soul, except it work in fellowship with right reason and a sanctified heart. The fancy is a power of the soul, placed between the senses and the understanding; it is that which first stirs itself in the soul, and by its motions the other powers of the soul are brought into exercise; it is that in which thoughts are first formed, and as that is, so are they. If imaginations be not first cast down, it is impossible that every thought of the heart should be brought into obedience to Christ. The fancy is naturally the wildest and most untameable power of the soul. Some Christians have much to do with it; and the more spiritual the heart is, the more does a wild and vain fancy disturb and perplex it. It is a sad thing that one's imagination should call off the soul from attending on God, when it is engaged in communion with him. Pray earnestly and perseveringly that your fancy may be chastened and sanctified, and when this is accomplished your thoughts will be regular and fixed.

4. If you would keep your heart from vain excursions when engaged in duties, realize to yourself, by faith, the holy and awful presence of God. If the presence of a grave man would compose you to seriousness, how much more should the presence of a holy God? Do you think that you would dare to be gay and light if you

realized the presence and inspection of the Divine Being? Remember where you are when engaged in religious duty, and act as if you believed in the omniscience of God. "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Realize his infinite holiness, his purity, his spirituality.

Strive to obtain such apprehensions of the greatness of God as shall suitably affect your heart; and remember his jealousy over his worship. "This is that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified." "A man that is praying (says Bernard) should behave himself as if he were entering into the court of heaven, where he sees the Lord upon his throne, surrounded with ten thousand of his angels and saints ministering unto him."—When you come from an exercise in which your heart has been wandering and listless, what can you say? Suppose all the vanities and impertinences which have passed through your mind during a devotional exercise were written down and interlined with your petitions, could you have the face to present them to God? Should your tongue utter all the thoughts of your heart when at tending the worship of God, would not men abhor you? Yet your thoughts are perfectly known to God. O think upon this scripture: "God is greatly to be feared in the assemblies of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." Why did the Lord descend in thunderings and lightnings and dark clouds upon Sinai? why did the mountains smoke under him, the people quake and tremble round about him, Moses himself not excepted? but to teach the people this great truth: "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve Him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire." Such apprehensions of the character and presence of God will quickly reduce a heart inclined to vanity to a more serious frame.

5. Maintain a prayerful frame of heart in the intervals of duty. What reason can be assigned why our hearts are so dull, so careless, so wandering, when we hear or pray, but that there have been long intermissions in our communion with God? If that divine unction, that spiritual fervour, and those holy impressions, which we obtain from God while engaged in the performance of one duty, were preserved to enliven and engage us in the performance of another,

they would be of incalculable service to keep our hearts serious and devout. For this purpose, frequent ejaculations between stated and solemn duties are of most excellent use: they not only preserve the mind in a composed and pious frame, but they connect one stated duty, as it were, with another, and keep the attention of the soul alive to all its interests and obligations.

6. If you would have the distraction of your thoughts prevented, endeavour to raise your affections to God, and to engage them warmly in your duty. When the soul is intent upon any work, it gathers in its strength and bends all its thoughts to that work; and when it is deeply affected, it will pursue its object with intenseness, the affections will gain, an ascendancy over the thoughts and guide them. But deadness causes distraction, and distraction increases deadness. Could you but regard your duties as the medium in which you might walk in communion with *God* in which your soul might be filled with those ravishing and matchless delights which his presence affords, you might have no inclination to neglect them. But if you would prevent the recurrence of distracting thoughts, if you would find your happiness in the performance of duty, you must not only be careful that you engage in what is your duty, but labour with patient and persevering exertion to interest your feelings in it. Why is your heart so inconstant, especially in secret duties; why are you ready to be gone, almost as soon as you are come into the presence of God, but because your affections are not engaged?

7. When you are disturbed by vain thoughts, humble yourself before God, and call in assistance from Heaven. When the messenger of Satan buffeted St. Paul by wicked suggestions, (as is supposed) he mourned before God on account of it. Never slight wandering thoughts in duty as small matters; follow every such thought with a deep regret. Turn to God with such words as these: 'Lord, I came hither to commune with thee, and here a busy adversary and a vain heart, conspiring together, have opposed me. O my God what a heart have I! shall I never wait upon thee without distraction? when shall I enjoy an hour of free communion with thee? Grant me thy assistance at this time; discover thy glory to me, and my heart will quickly be recovered. I came hither to enjoy thee,

and shall I go away without thee? Behold my distress, and help me!’—Could you but sufficiently bewail your distractions, and repair to God for deliverance from them, you would gain relief.

8. Look upon the success and the comfort of your duties, as depending very much upon the keeping of your heart close with God in them. These two things, the success of duty and the inward comfort arising from the performance of it, are unspeakably dear to the Christian; but both of these will be lost if the heart be in a listless state. “Surely God heareth not vanity, nor doth the Almighty regard it.” The promise is made to a heart engaged: “Then shall ye seek for me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your hearts.” When you find your heart under the power of deadness and distraction, say to yourself, ‘O what do I lose by a careless heart now! My praying seasons, are the most valuable portions of my life: could I but raise my heart to God, I might now obtain such mercies as would be matter of praise to all eternity.’

9. Regard your carefulness or carelessness in this matter as a great evidence of your sincerity, or hypocrisy. Nothing will alarm an upright heart more than this. ‘What shall I give way to a customary wandering of the heart from God? Shall the spot of the hypocrite appear upon my soul? Hypocrites, indeed, can drudge on in the round of duty, never regarding the frame of their hearts; but shall I do so? Never — never let me be satisfied with empty duties. Never let me take my leave of a duty until my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.’

10. It will be of special use to keep your heart with God in duty, to consider what influence all your duties will have upon your eternity. Your religious seasons are your seed times, and in another world you must reap the fruits of what you sow in your duties here. If you sow to the flesh, you will reap corruption; if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap life everlasting. Answer seriously these questions: Are you willing to reap the fruit of vanity in the world to come? Dare you say, when your thoughts are roving to the ends of the earth in duty, when you scarce mind what you say or hear, ‘Now, Lord, I am sowing to the Spirit; now I am providing and laying up for eternity; now I am seeking for glory, honour and

immortality; now I am striving to enter in at the strait gate; now I am taking the kingdom of heaven by holy violence!’ Such reflections are well calculated to dissipate vain thoughts.

The *seventh season*, which requires more than common diligence to keep the heart, is when *we receive injuries and abuses from men*. Such is the depravity and corruption of man, that one is become as a wolf or a tiger to another. And as men are naturally cruel and oppressive one to another, so the wicked conspire to abuse and wrong the people of God, “The wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he.” Now when we are thus abused and wronged, it is hard to keep the heart from revengeful motions; to make it meekly and quietly commit the cause to Him that judgeth righteously; to prevent the exercise of any sinful affection. The spirit that is in us lusteth to revenge; but it must not be so. We have choice helps in the Gospel to keep our hearts from sinful motions against our enemies, and to sweeten our embittered spirits. Do you ask how a Christian may keep his heart from revengeful motions under the greatest injuries and abuses from men? I reply: When you find your heart begin to be inflamed by revengeful feelings, immediately reflect on the following things

1. Urge upon your heart the severe prohibitions of revenge contained in the law of God. However gratifying to your corrupt propensities revenge may be, remember that it is forbidden. Hear the word of God: “Say not, I will recompense evil.” Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me. “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Avenge not yourselves, but give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.” On the contrary. “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.” It was an argument urged by the Christians to prove their religion to be supernatural and pure, that it forbids revenge, which is so agreeable to nature; and it is to be wished that such an argument might not be laid aside. Awe your heart, then, with the authority of God in the Scriptures; and when carnal reason says, ‘My enemy deserves to be hated,’ let conscience reply, ‘But doth God deserve to be disobeyed?’ ‘Thus and thus hath he done, and so hath he wronged me;’ ‘But what hath God done that I should

wrong him? If my enemy dares boldly to break the peace, shall I be so wicked as to break the precept? if he fears not to wrong me, shall not I fear to wrong God?' Thus let the fear of God restrain and calm your feelings.

2. Set before your eyes the most eminent patterns of meekness and forgiveness, that you may feel the force of their example. This is the way to cut off the common pleas of flesh and blood for revenge: as thus, 'No man would bear such an affront;' yes, others have borne as bad, and worse ones. 'But I shall be reckoned a coward, a fool, if I pass by this:' no matter, so long as you follow the examples of the wisest and holiest of men. Never did any one suffer more or greater abuses from men than Jesus did, nor did any one ever endure insult and reproach and every kind of abuse in a more peaceful and forgiving manner; when he Was reviled he reviled not again; when he suffered. he threatened not when his murderers. crucified him he prayed *Father, forgive them*; and herein he hath set us an example, that we should follow his steps. Thus his apostles imitated him: "Being reviled," say they, "we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat." I have often heard it reported of the holy Mr. Dod, that when a man, enraged at his close, convincing doctrine, assaulted him, smote him on the face and dashed out two of his teeth; that meek servant of Christ spit out the teeth and blood into his hand, and said, "See here, you have knocked out two of my teeth, and that without any just provocation; but on condition that I might do your soul good, I would give you leave to knock out all the rest." Here was exemplified the excellency of the Christian spirit. Strive then for this spirit, which constitutes the true excellence of Christians. Do what others cannot do, keep this spirit in exercise, and you will preserve peace in your own soul and gain the victory over your enemies.

3. Consider the character of the person who has wronged you. He is either a good or a wicked man. If he is a good man, there is light and tenderness in his conscience, which sooner or later will bring him to a sense of the evil of what he has done. If he is a good man, Christ has forgiven him greater injuries than he has done to you; and why should not you forgive him? Will Christ not upbraid him

for any of his wrongs, but frankly forgive them all; and will you take him by the throat for some petty abuse which he has offered you?

4. But if a wicked man has injured or insulted you, truly you have more reason to exercise pity than revenge toward him. He is in a deluded and miserable state; a slave to sin and an enemy to righteousness. If he should ever repent, he will be ready to make you reparation; if he continues impenitent, there is a day coming when he will be punished to the extent of his deserts. You need not study revenge, God will execute vengeance upon him.

5. Remember that by revenge you can only gratify a sinful passion, which by forgiveness you might conquer. Suppose that by revenge you might destroy one enemy; yet, by exercising the Christian's temper you might conquer three—your own lust, Satan's temptation, and your enemy's heart. If by revenge you should overcome your enemy, the victory would be unhappy and inglorious, for in gaining it you would be overcome by your own corruption; but by exercising a meek and forgiving temper, you will always come off with honour and success. It must be a very disingenuous nature indeed upon which meekness and forgiveness will not operate; that must be a flinty heart which this fire will not melt. Thus David gained such a victory over Saul his persecutor, that "Saul lifted up his voice and wept, and he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I."

6. Seriously propose this question to your own heart: 'Have I got any good by means of the wrongs and injuries which I have received?' If they have done you no good, turn your revenge upon yourself. You have reason to be filled with shame and sorrow that you should have a heart which can deduce no good from such troubles; that your temper should be so unlike that of Christ. The patience and meekness of other Christians have turned all the injuries offered to them to a good account; their souls have been animated to praise God when they have been loaded with reproaches from the world. "I thank my God," said Jerome, "that I am worthy to be hated of the world." But if you have derived any benefit from the reproaches and wrongs which you have received, if they have put you upon examining your own heart, if they have

made you more careful how you conduct, if they have convinced you of the value of a sanctified temper; will you not forgive them? will you not forgive one who has been instrumental of so much good to you? What though he meant it for evil? if through the Divine blessing your happiness has been promoted by what he has done, why should you even have a hard thought of him?

7. Consider by whom all your troubles are ordered. This will be of great use to keep your heart from revenge; this will quickly calm and sweeten your temper. When Shimei railed at David and cursed him, the spirit of that good man was not at all poisoned by revenge; for when Abishai offered him if he pleased, the head of Shimei, the king said, "Let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, curse David: who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" It may be that God uses him as his rod to chastise me, because by my sin I gave the enemies of God occasion to blaspheme; and shall I be angry with the instrument? how irrational were that! Thus Job was quieted; he did not rail and meditate revenge upon the Chaldeans and Sabeans, but regarded God as the orderer of his troubles, and said, "The Lord hath taken away, blessed be his name."

8. Consider how you are daily and hourly wronging God, and you will not be so easily inflamed with revenge against those who have wronged you. You are constantly affronting God, yet he does not take vengeance on you, but bears with you and forgives; and will you rise up and avenge yourself upon others? Reflect on this cutting rebuke: "O thou wicked and slothful servant! I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me; shouldst thou not also have compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" None should be so filled with forbearance and mercy to such as wrong them, as those who have experienced the riches of mercy themselves. The mercy of God to us should melt our hearts into mercy toward others. It is impossible that we should be cruel to others, except we forget how kind and compassionate God hath been to us. And if kindness cannot prevail in us, methinks fear should:—"If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

9. Let the consideration that the day of the Lord draweth nigh, restrain you from anticipating it by acts of revenge. Why are you so

hasty? is not the Lord at hand to avenge all his abused servants? “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth, &c. Be ye also patient, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned. Behold, the Judge standeth at the door.” Vengeance belongeth unto God, and will you wrong yourself so much as to assume his work?

The *eighth season*, in which special exertion is necessary to keep the heart, is when we meet with *great trials*. In such cases the heart is apt to be suddenly transported with pride, impatience, or other sinful passions. Many good people are guilty of hasty and very sinful conduct in such instances; and all have need to use diligently the following means to keep their hearts submissive and patient under great trials:

1. Get humble and abasing thoughts of yourself. The humble is ever the patient man. Pride is the source of irregular and sinful passions. A lofty, will be an unyielding and peevish spirit. When we over-rate ourselves, we think that we are treated unworthily, that our trials are too severe: thus we cavil and repine. Christian, you should have such thoughts of yourself as would put a stop to these murmurings. You should have lower and more humiliating views of yourself than any other one can have of you. Get humility, and you will have peace whatever be your trial.

2. Cultivate a habit of communion with God. This will prepare you for whatever may take place. This will so sweeten your temper and calm your mind as to secure you against surprisals. This will produce that inward peace which will make you superior to your trials. Habitual communion with God will afford you enjoyment, which you can never be willing to interrupt by sinful feeling. When a Christian is calm and submissive under his afflictions, probably he derives support and comfort in this way; but he who is discomposed, impatient, or fretful, shows that `all is not right within—he cannot be supposed to practise communion with God.

3. Let your mind be deeply impressed with an apprehension of the evil nature and effects of an unsubmissive and restless temper. It grieves the Spirit of God, and induces his departure. His gracious

presence and influence are enjoyed only where peace and quiet submission prevail. The indulgence of such a temper gives the adversary an advantage. Satan is an angry and discontented spirit. He finds no rest but in restless hearts. He bestirs himself when the spirits are in commotion; sometimes he fills the heart with ungrateful and rebellious thoughts; sometimes he inflames the tongue with indecent language. Again, such a temper brings great guilt upon the conscience, unfits the soul for any duty, and dishonours the Christian name. O keep your heart, and let the power and excellence of your religion be chiefly manifested when you are brought into the greatest straits.

4. Consider how desirable it is for a Christian to overcome his evil propensities. How much more present happiness it affords; how much better it is in every respect to mortify and subdue unholy feelings, than to give way to them. When upon your death-bed you come calmly to review your life, how comfortable will it be to reflect on the conquest which you have made over the depraved feelings of your heart. It was a memorable saying of Valentinian the emperor, when he was about to die: "Amongst all my conquests, there is but one that now comforts me" Being asked what that was, he answered, "I have overcome my worst enemy, my own sinful heart!"

5. Shame yourself, by contemplating the character of those who have been most eminent for meekness and submission. Above all, compare your temper with the Spirit of Christ. "Learn of me," saith he, "for I am meek and lowly." It is said of Calvin and Ursin, though both of choleric natures, that they had so imbibed and cultivated the meekness of Christ as not to utter an unbecoming word under the greatest provocations. And even many of the heathens have manifested great moderation and forbearance under their severest afflictions. Is it not a shame and a reproach that you should be outdone by them?

6. Avoid every thing which is calculated to irritate your feelings. It is true spiritual valor to keep as far as we can out of sins way. If you can but avoid the excitements to impetuous and rebellious feelings, or check them in their first beginnings, you will have but little to fear. The first workings of common sins are comparatively

weak, they gain their strength by degrees; but in times of trial the motions of sin are strongest at first, the unsubdued temper breaks out suddenly and violently. But if you resolutely withstand it at first, it will yield and give you the victory.

The *ninth season* wherein the greatest diligence and skill are necessary to keep the heart, is the hour of *temptation*, when Satan besets the Christians heart, and takes the unwary by surprise. To keep the heart at such times, is not less a mercy than a duty. Few Christians are so skilful in detecting the fallacies, and repelling the arguments by which the adversary incites them to sin, as to come off safe and whole in these encounters. Many eminent saints have smarted severely for their want of watchfulness and diligence at such times. How then may a Christian keep his heart from yielding to temptation? There are several principal ways in which the adversary insinuates temptation, and urges compliance:

1. Satan suggests that here is pleasure to be enjoyed; the temptation is presented with a smiling aspect and an enticing voice: What, are you so dull and phlegmatic as not to feel the powerful charms of pleasure? Who can withhold himself from such delights? Reader, you may be rescued from the danger of such temptations by repelling the proposal of pleasure. It is urged that the commission of sin will afford you pleasure. Suppose this were true, will the accusing and condemning rebukes of conscience and the flames of hell be pleasant too? Is there pleasure in the scourges of conscience? If so why did Peter weep so bitterly? why did David cry out of broken bones? You hear what is said of the pleasure of sin, and have you not read what David said of the effects of it? "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," &c. If you yield to temptation, you must feel such inward distress on account of it, or the miseries of hell. But why should the pretended pleasure of sin allure you, when you know that unspeakably more real pleasure will arise from the mortification than can arise from the commission of sin. Will you prefer the gratification of some unhallowed passion, with the deadly poison which it will leave

behind, to that sacred pleasure which arises from fearing and obeying God, complying with the dictates of conscience, and maintaining inward peace? Can sin afford any such delight as he feels who, by resisting temptation, has manifested the sincerity of his heart, and obtained evidence that he fears God, loves holiness, and hates sin?

2. The secrecy with which you may commit sin is made use of to induce compliance with temptation. The tempter insinuates that this indulgence will never disgrace you among men, for no one will know it. But recollect yourself. Does not God behold you? Is not the divine presence every where? What if you might hide your sin from the eyes of the world, you cannot hide it from God. No darkness nor shadow of death can screen you from his inspection. Besides have you no reverence for yourself? Can you do that by yourself which you dare not have others observe? Is not your conscience as a thousand witnesses? Even a heathen could say, "When thou art tempted to commit sin, fear thyself without any other witness."

3. The prospect of worldly advantage often enforces temptation. It is suggested, Why should you be so nice and scrupulous? Give yourself a little liberty, and you may better your condition: now is your time. This is a dangerous temptation, and must be promptly resisted. Yielding to such a temptation will do your soul more injury than any temporal acquisition can possibly do you good. And what would it profit you, if you should gain the whole world and lose your own soul? What can be compared with the value of your spiritual interests? or what can at all compensate for the smallest injury of them?

4. Perhaps the smallness of the sin is urged as a reason why you may commit it; thus: It is but a little one, a small matter, a trifle; who Would stand upon such niceties? But is the Majesty of heaven little too? If you commit this sin you will offend a great God. Is there any little hell to torment little sinners in? No; the least sinners in hell are full of misery. There is great wrath treasured up for those whom the world regard as little sinners. But the less the sin, the less the inducement to commit it. Will you provoke God for a trifle? will you destroy your peace, wound your conscience, and grieve the

Spirit, all for nothing? What madness is this!

5. An argument to enforce temptation is sometimes drawn from the mercy of God and the hope of pardon—God is merciful, he will pass by this as an infirmity, he will not be severe to mark it. But stay: where do you find a promise of mercy to presumptuous sinners? Involuntary reprisals and lamented infirmities may be pardoned, “but the soul that doth aught presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.” If God is a being of so much mercy, how can you affront him? How can you make so glorious an attribute as the divine mercy an occasion of sin? Will you wrong him because he is good? Rather let his goodness lead you to repentance, and keep you from transgression.

6. Sometimes Satan encourages to the commission of sin, from the examples of holy men. Thus and thus they sinned, and were restored; therefore you may commit this sin, and yet. be a saint and be saved. Such suggestions must be instantly repelled. If good men have committed sins similar to that with which you are beset, did any good man ever sin upon such ground and from such encouragement as is here presented? Did God cause their examples to be recorded for your imitation, or for your warning? Are they not set up as beacons that you may avoid the rocks upon which they split? Are you willing to feel what they felt for sin? Dare you follow them in sin, and plunge yourself into such distress and danger as they incurred?—Reader, in these ways learn to keep your heart in the hour of temptation.

Tenth season, the time of *doubting and of spiritual darkness* constitutes another season when it is very difficult to keep the heart. When the light and comfort of the divine presence is withdrawn; when the believer, from the prevalence of indwelling sin in one form or other, is ready to renounce his hopes, to infer desperate conclusions with respect to himself, to regard his former comforts as vain delusions, and his professions as hypocrisy; at such a time much diligence is necessary to keep the heart from despondency. The Christian’s distress arises from his apprehension of his spiritual state, and in general he argues against his

possessing true religion, either from his having relapsed into the same sins from which he had formerly been recovered with shame and sorrow; or from the sensible declining of his affections from God; or from the strength of his affections toward creature enjoyments; or from his enlargement in public, while he is often confined and barren in private duties; or from some horrible suggestions of Satan, with which his soul is greatly perplexed; or, lastly, from God's silence and seeming denial of his long depending prayers. Now in order to the establishment and support of the heart under these circumstances, it is necessary that you be acquainted with some general truths which have a tendency to calm the trembling and doubting soul; and that you be rightly instructed with regard to the above-mentioned causes of disquiet. Let me direct your attention to the following general truths:

1. Every appearance of hypocrisy does not prove the person who manifests it to be a hypocrite. You should carefully distinguish between the appearance and the predominance of hypocrisy. There are remains of deceitfulness in the best hearts; this was exemplified in David and Peter; but the prevailing frame of their hearts being upright, they were not denominated hypocrites for their conduct.

2. We ought to regard what can be said in our favour, as well as what may be said against us. It is the sin of upright persons sometimes, to exercise an unreasonable severity against themselves. They do not impartially consider the state of their souls. To make their state appear better than it really is, indeed is the damning sin of self-flattering hypocrites; and to make their state appear worse than it really is, is the sin and folly of some good persons. But why should you be such an enemy to your own peace? Why read over the evidences of God's love to your soul, as a man does a book which he intends to confute? Why do you study evasions, and turn off those comforts which are due to you?

3. Every thing which may be an occasion of grief to the people of God, is not a sufficient ground for their questioning the reality of their religion. Many things may trouble, which ought not to stumble you. If upon every occasion you should call in question all that had ever been wrought upon you, your life would be made up of doubtings and fears, and you could never attain that settled

inward peace, and live that life of praise and thankfulness which the Gospel requires.

4. The soul is not at all times in a suitable state to pass a right judgment upon itself. It is peculiarly unqualified for this in the hour of desertion or temptation. Such seasons must be improved rather for watching and resisting, than for judging and determining.

5. Whatever be the ground of one's distress, it should drive him to, not from God. Suppose you have sinned thus and so, or that you have been thus long and sadly deserted, yet you have no right to infer that you ought to be discouraged, as if there was no help for you in God. When you have well digested these truths, if your doubts and distress remain, consider what is now to be offered:

(1). Are you ready to conclude that you have no part in the favour of God, because you are visited with some extraordinary affliction? If so, do you then rightly conclude that great trials are tokens of God's hatred? Does the Scripture teach this? And dare you infer the same with respect to all who have been as much or more afflicted than yourself? If the argument is good in your case, it is good in application to theirs, and more conclusive with respect to them, in proportion as their trials were greater than yours. Woe then to David, Job, Paul, and all who have been afflicted as they were! But had you passed along in quietness and prosperity; had God withheld those chastisements with which he ordinarily visits his people, would you not have had far more reason for doubts and distress than you now have?

(2). Do you rashly infer that the Lord has no love to you, because he has withdrawn the light of his countenance? Do you imagine your state to be hopeless, because it is dark and uncomfortable? Be not hasty in forming this conclusion. If any of the dispensations of God to his people will bear a favourable as well as a harsh construction, why should they not be construed in the best sense? And may not God have a design of love rather than of hatred in the dispensation under which you mourn? May he not depart for a season, without departing for ever? You are not the first that have mistaken the design of God in withdrawing himself. "Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, my Lord hath forgotten me." But was it so? What saith the answer of God? "Can a woman forget her sucking

child?" &c.

But do you sink down under the apprehension that the evidences of a total and final desertion are discoverable in your experience? Have you then lost your conscientious tenderness with regard to sin? and are you inclined to forsake God? If so, you have reason indeed to be alarmed. But if your conscience is tenderly alive; if you are resolved to cleave to the Lord; if the language of your heart is, I cannot forsake God, I cannot live without his presence; though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: then you have reason to hope that he will visit you again. It is by these exercises that he still maintains his interest in you.

Once more. Are sense and feelings suitable to judge of the dispensations of God by? Can their testimony be safely relied on? Is it safe to argue thus: 'If God had any love for my soul, I should feel it now as well as in former times; but I cannot feel it, therefore it is gone?' May you not as well conclude, when the sun is invisible to you, that he has ceased to exist? Read Isaiah 1:10.

Now if there is nothing in the divine dealings with you which is a reasonable ground of your despondency and distress, let us inquire what there is in your own conduct for which you should be so cast down:

1. Have you committed sins from which you were formerly recovered with shame and sorrow? And do you thence conclude that you sin allowedly and habitually, and that your oppositions to sin were hypocritical? But do not too hastily give up all for lost. Is not your repentance and care renewed as often as you commit sin? Is it not the sin itself which troubles you, and is it not true, that the oftener you sin the more you are distressed? It is not so in customary sinning; of which Bernard excellently discourses thus: "When a man accustomed to restrain, sins grievously, it seems insupportable to him, yea he seems to descend alive into hell. In process of time it seems not insupportable, but heavy, and between insupportable and heavy there is no small descent. Next, such sinning becomes light, his conscience smites but faintly, and he regards not her rebukes. Then he is not only insensible to his guilt, but that which was bitter and displeasing has become in some degree sweet and pleasant. Now it is made a custom, and not only

pleases, but pleases habitually. At length custom becomes nature; he cannot be dissuaded from it, but defends and pleads for it." This is allowed and customary sinning, this is the way of the wicked. But is not your way the contrary of this?

2. Do you apprehend a decline of your affections from God and from spiritual subjects? This may be your case, and yet there may be hope. But possibly you are mistaken with regard to this. There are many things to be learnt in Christian experience; it has relation to a great variety of subjects. You may now be learning what it is very necessary for you to know as a Christian. Now, what if you are not sensible of so lively affections, of such ravishing views as you had at first; may not your piety be growing more solid and consistent, and better adapted to practical purposes? Does it follow from your not always being in the same frame of mind, or from the fact that the same objects do not at all times excite the same feelings, that you have no true religion? Perhaps you deceive yourself by looking forward to what you would be, rather than contemplating what you are, compared with what you once were.

3. If the strength of your love to creature-enjoyments is the ground of desperate conclusions respecting yourself, perhaps you argue thus: "I fear that I love the creature more than God, if so, I have not true love to God. I sometimes feel stronger affections toward earthly comforts than I do toward heavenly objects, therefore my soul is not upright within me." If, indeed, you love the creature for itself, if you make it your end, and religion but a means, then you conclude rightly; for this is incompatible with supreme love to God. But may not a man love God more ardently and unchangeably than he does any thing, or all things else, and yet, when God is not the direct object of his thoughts, may he not be sensible of more violent affection for the creature than he has at that time for God? As rooted malice indicates a stronger hatred than sudden though inure violent passion; so we must judge of our love, not by a violent motion of it now and then, but by the depth of its root and the constancy of its exercise. Perhaps your difficulty results from bringing your love to some foreign and improper test. Many persons have feared that when brought to some eminent trial they should renounce Christ and cleave to the creature; but when

the trial came, Christ was every thing, and the world as nothing in their esteem. Such were the fears of some martyrs whose victory was complete. But you may expect divine assistance only at the time of, and in proportion to your necessity. If you would try your love, see whether you are willing to forsake Christ now.

4. Is the want of that enlargement in private which you find in public exercises an occasion of doubts and fears? Consider then whether there are not some circumstances attending public duties which are peculiarly calculated to excite your feelings and elevate your mind, and which cannot affect you in private. If so, your exercises in secret, if performed faithfully and in a suitable manner, may be profitable, though they have not all the characteristics of those in public. If you imagine that you have spiritual enlargement and enjoyment in public exercises while you neglect private duties, doubtless you deceive yourself. Indeed *if you live in the neglect of secret duties, or are careless about them, you have great reason to fear*. But if you regularly and faithfully perform them, it does not follow that they are vain and worthless, or that they are not of great value, because they are not attended with so much enlargement as you sometimes find in public. And what if the Spirit is pleased more highly to favour you with his gracious influence in one place and at one time than another, should this be a reason for murmuring and unbelief, or for thankfulness?

5. The vile or blasphemous suggestions of Satan sometimes occasion great perplexity and distress.—They seem to lay open an abyss of corruption in the heart, and to say there can be no grace here. But there may be grace in the heart where such thoughts are injected, though not, in the heart which consents to and cherishes them. Do you then abhor and oppose them? do you utterly refuse to give up yourself to their influence, and strive to keep holy and reverend thoughts of God, and of all religious objects? If so, such suggestions are involuntary, and no evidence against your piety.

6. Is the seeming denial of your prayers an occasion of despondency? Are you disposed to say, “If God had any regard for my soul he would have heard my petitions before now; but I have no answer from him, and therefore no interest in him?” But stay: though God’s abhorring and finally rejecting prayer is an evidence

that he rejects the person who prays, yet, dare you conclude that he has rejected you, because an answer to your prayers is delayed, or because you do not discover it if granted? “May not God bear long with his own elect, that cry unto him day and night?”

Others have stumbled upon the same ground with you: “I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardst the voice of my supplication.” Now are there not some things in your experience which indicate that your prayers are not rejected, though answer to them is deferred? Are you not disposed to continue praying though you do not discover an answer? Are you not disposed still to ascribe righteousness to God, while you consider the cause of his silence as being in yourself? Thus did David: “O my God, I cry in the day time, and thou hearest not; and in the night, and am not silent: but thou art holy,” &c. Does not the delay of an answer to your prayers excite you to examine your own heart and try your ways, that you may find and remove the difficulty? If so, you may have reason for humiliation, but not for despair.

Thus I have shown you how to keep your heart in dark and doubting seasons. God forbid that any false heart should encourage itself from these things. It is lamentable, that when we give saints and sinners their proper portions, each is so prone to take up the other’s part.

Eleventh season, wherein the heart must be kept with all diligence, is *when sufferings for religion are laid upon us*. Blessed is the man who in such a season is not offended in Christ. Now, whatever may be the kind or degree of your sufferings, if they are sufferings for Christ’s sake and the Gospel’s, spare no diligence to keep your heart. If you are tempted to shrink or waver under them, let what follows help you to repel and to surmount the instigation:

1. What reproach would you cast upon the Redeemer and his religion by deserting him at such a time as this! You would proclaim to the world, that how much soever you have boasted of the promises when you are put to the proof you dare hazard no thing upon your faith in them; and this will give the enemies of Christ an occasion to blaspheme. And will you thus furnish the

triumphs of the uncircumcised? Ah, if you did but value the name of Christ as much as many wicked men value their names, you could never endure that his should be exposed to contempt. Will proud dust and ashes hazard death or hell rather than have their names disgraced, and will you endure nothing to maintain the honour of Christ?

2. Dare you violate your conscience out of complaisance to flesh and blood? Who will comfort you when your conscience accuses and condemns you? What happiness can there be in life, liberty or friends, when inward peace is taken away? Consider well what you do.

3. Is not the public interest of Christ and his cause infinitely more important than any interest of your own, and should you not prefer his glory and the welfare of his kingdom before every thing else? Should any temporary suffering, or any sacrifice which you can be called to make, be suffered to come into competition with the honour of his name?

4. Did the Redeemer neglect your interest and think lightly of you, when for your sake he endured sufferings between which and yours there can be no comparison? Did he hesitate and shrink back? No: "He endured the cross, despising the shame." And did he with unbroken patience and constancy endure so much for you; and will you flinch from momentary suffering in his cause?

5. Can you so easily cast off the society and the privileges of the saints and go over to the enemy's side? Are you willing to withhold your support from those who are determined to persevere, and throw your influence in the scale against them? Rather let your body and soul be rent asunder. "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

6. How can you stand before Christ in the day of judgment, if you desert him now? "He that is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Yet a little while, and the Son of man will come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, to judge the world. He will sit upon the throne of judgment, while all the nations are brought before him. Imagine yourself now to be witnessing the

transactions of that day. Behold the wicked; behold the apostates; and hear the consuming sentence which is pronounced upon them, and see them sinking in the gulf of infinite and everlasting woe! And will you desert Christ now, will you forsake his cause to save a little suffering, or to protract an unprofitable life on earth, and thus expose yourself to the doom of the apostate? Remember, that if you can silence the remonstrances of conscience now, you cannot hinder the sentence of the Judge then. By these means *keep your heart, that it depart not from the living God.*

The *last season* which I shall mention, in which the heart must be kept with all diligence, is *when we are warned by sickness that our dissolution is at hand.* When the child of God draws nigh to eternity, the adversary makes his last effort; and as he cannot win the soul from God, as he cannot dissolve the bond which unites the soul to Christ, his great design is to awaken fears of death, to fill the mind with aversion and horror at the thoughts of dissolution from the body. Hence, what shrinking from a separation, what fear to grasp death's cold hand, and unwillingness to depart, may sometimes be observed in the people of God. But we ought to die, as well as live, like saints.

I shall offer several considerations calculated to help the people of God in time of sickness, to keep their hearts loose from all earthly objects, and cheerfully willing to die:

1. Death is harmless to the people of God; its shafts leave no sting in them. Why then are you afraid that your sickness may be unto death? If you were to die in your sins; if death were to reign over you as a tyrant, to feed upon you as a lion doth upon his prey; if death to you were to be the precursor of hell, then you might reasonably startle and shrink back from it with horror and dismay. But if your sins are blotted out; if Christ has vanquished death in your behalf, so that you have nothing to encounter but bodily pain, and possibly not even that; if death will be to you the harbinger of heaven, why should you be afraid? why not bid it welcome? It cannot hurt you; it is easy and harmless; it is like putting off your clothes, on taking rest.

2. It may keep your heart from shrinking back, to consider that

death is necessary to fit you for the full enjoyment of God. Whether you are willing to die or not, there certainly is no other way to complete the happiness of your soul. Death must do you the kind office to remove this veil of flesh, this animal life which separates you from God, before you can see and enjoy him fully. "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." And who would not be willing to die for the perfect enjoyment of God? Methinks one should look and sigh, like a prisoner, through the grates of this mortality: "O that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest." Indeed most men need patience to die; but a saint, who understands what death will introduce him to, rather needs patience to live. On his death-bed he should often look out and listen to his Lord's coming; and when he perceives his dissolution to be near, he should say, "The voice of my beloved; behold he cometh, leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills."

3. Consider that the happiness of heaven commences immediately after death. *That* happiness will not be deferred till the resurrection; but as soon as death has passed upon you, your soul will be swallowed up in life. When you have once loosed from this shore, you shall be quickly wafted to the shore of a glorious eternity. And can you not say, *I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ?* Did the soul and body die together, or did they sleep till the resurrection, as some have fancied, it would have been folly for Paul to desire a dissolution for the enjoyment of Christ; because he would have enjoyed more in the body than he could have enjoyed out of it.

The Scripture speaks of but two ways in which the soul can properly live: viz, by faith and *vision*. These two comprehend its present and future existence.

Now, if when faith fails, sight should not immediately succeed, what would become of the soul? But the truth on this subject is clearly revealed in Scripture. See Luke 23:3; John 14:3, &c. What a blessed change then will death make in your condition! Rouse up, dying saint, and rejoice; let death do his work, that the angels may conduct your soul to the world of light.

4. It may increase your willingness to die, to reflect that by death

God often removes his people out of the way of great troubles and temptations. When some extraordinary calamity is coming upon the world, God sometimes removes his saints out of the way of the evil. Thus Methuselah died the year before the flood; Augustine a little before the sacking of Hippo; Pareus just before the taking of Heidelberg. Luther observes that all the apostles died before the destruction of Jerusalem; and Luther himself died before the wars broke out in Germany. Now it may be that by death you will escape some grievous trial, which you could not and need not endure. But if no extraordinary trouble would come upon you in case your life were prolonged, yet God designs by death to relieve you from innumerable evils and burdens which are inseparable from the present state. Thus you will be delivered from indwelling sin, which is the greatest trouble; from all temptations from whatever source; from bodily tempers and embarrassments; and from all the afflictions and sorrows of this life. The days of your mourning will be ended, and God will wipe away all tears from your eyes. Why then should you not hasten to depart?

5. If you still linger, like Lot in Sodom, what are your pleas and pretences for a longer life? Why are you unwilling to die? Are you concerned for the welfare of your relations? If so, are you anxious for their temporal support? Then let the word of God satisfy you: "Leave thy fatherless children to me, I will keep them alive, and let thy widows trust in me." Luther says, in his last will, "Lord, thou hast given me a wife and children, I have nothing to leave them, but I commit them unto thee. O Father of the fatherless and Judge of widows, nourish, keep and teach them."

But are you concerned for the spiritual welfare of your relations? Remember that you cannot convert them, if you should live; and God can make your prayers and counsels effectual when you are dead.

Perhaps you desire to serve God longer in this world. But if he has nothing further for you to do here, why not say with David, "Here am I, let him do what seemeth him good." He is calling you to higher service in heaven, and can accomplish by other hands what you desire to do further here.—Do you feel too imperfect to go to heaven? Consider that you must be imperfect until you die;

your sanctification cannot be complete until you get to heaven.

‘But,’ you say, ‘I want assurance; if I had that I could die easily.’ Consider, then, that a hearty willingness to leave all the world to be freed from sin, and to be with God, is the direct way to that desired assurance; no carnal person was ever willing to die upon this ground.

Thus I have shown how the people of God, in the most difficult seasons, may keep their hearts with all diligence.

I now proceed to *improve* and *apply* the subject:

1. You have seen that the keeping of the heart is the great work of a Christian, in which the very soul and life of religion consists, and without which all other duties are of no value in the sight of God. Hence, to the consternation of hypocrites and formal professors, I infer:

(1). That the pains and labours which many persons have undergone in religion are of no value, and will turn to no good account. Many splendid services have been performed by men, which God will utterly reject: they will not stand on record in order to an eternal acceptance, because the performers took no heed to keep their hearts with God. This is that fatal rock on which thousands of vain professors dash and ruin themselves eternally; they are exact about the externals of religion, but regardless of their hearts. O how many hours have some professors spent in hearing, praying, reading and conferring! and yet, as to the main end of religion, they might as well have sat still and done nothing, the great work, I mean heart-work, being all the while neglected. Tell me, vain professor, when did you shed a tear for the deadness, hardness, unbelief or earthliness of your heart? And do you think your easy religion can save you? If so, you must invert Christ’s words, and say, *Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to life, and many there be that go in thereat!* Hear me, ye self-deluding hypocrite; you who have put off God with heartless duties; you who have acted in religion as if you had been blessing an idol; you who could not search your heart, and regulate it, and exercise it in your performances; how will you abide the coming of the Lord? how will you hold up your head before him, when he

shall say. ‘O you dissembling, false-hearted man! how could you profess religion? with what face could you so often tell me that you loved me, when you knew in your conscience that your heart was not with me?’ O tremble to think what a fearful judgment it is to be given over to a heedless and careless heart, and then to have religious duties instead of a rattle to quiet and still the conscience!

(2). I infer for their humiliation, that unless the *people of God* spend more time and pains about their hearts than they ordinarily do, they are never like to do God much service, or to possess much comfort in this world. I may say of that Christian who is remiss and careless in keeping his heart, as Jacob said of Reuben, *Thou shalt not excel*. It grieves me to see how many Christians there are who live at a poor, low rate, both of service and comfort, and who go up and down dejected and complaining. But how can they expect it should be otherwise, while they live so carelessly?

O how little of their time is spent in the closet, in searching, humbling, and quickening their hearts!

Christian, you say your heart is dead, and do you wonder that it is, so long as you keep it not with the fountain of life? If your body had been dieted as your soul has, that would have been dead too. And you may never expect that your heart will be in a better state until you take more pains with it.

O Christians! I fear your zeal and strength have run in the wrong channel; I fear that most of us may take up the Church’s complaint: “They have made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vine-yard have I not kept.” Two things have eaten up the time and strength of the professors of this generation, and sadly diverted them from heart-work.

First, Fruitless controversies, started by Satan, I doubt not for the very purpose of taking us off from practical godliness, to make us puzzle our heads when we should be inspecting our hearts. How little have we regarded the observation: “It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, and not with meats,” (that is, with disputes and controversies about meats,) “which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.” How much better it is to see men live exactly, than to hear them dispute with subtlety!

These unfruitful questions, how have they rent the churches, wasted time and spirits, and taken Christians off from their main business! What think you, would it not have been better if the questions agitated among the people of God of late had been such as these: "How shall a man distinguish the special from the common operations of the Spirit? How may a soul discern its first backslidings from God? How may a backsliding Christian recover his first love? How may the heart be preserved from unseasonable thoughts in duty? How may a bosom-sin be discovered and mortified?" &c. Would not this course have tended more to the honour of religion and the comfort of souls? I am ashamed that the professors of this generation are yet insensible of their folly. O that God would turn their disputes and contentions into practical godliness!

Second, Worldly cares and incumbrances have greatly increased the neglect of our hearts. The heads and hearts of multitudes have been filled with such a crowd and noise of worldly business that they have lamentably declined in their zeal, their love, their delight in God, and their heavenly, serious, and profitable way of conversing with men. How miserably have we entangled ourselves in this wilderness of trifles! Our discourses, our conferences, nay, our very prayers are tinged with it. We have had so much to do without, that we have been able to do but little within. And how many precious opportunities have we thus lost? How many admonitions of the Spirit have passed over unfruitfully? How often has the Lord called to us, when our worldly thoughts have prevented us from hearing? But there certainly is a way to enjoy God even in our worldly employments. If we lose our views of him when engaged in our temporal affairs, the fault is our own. Alas! that Christians should stand at the door of eternity, having more work upon their hands than their time is sufficient for, and yet be filling their heads and hearts with trifles!

Third, I infer, lastly, for the awakening of all, that if the keeping of the heart be the great work of a Christian, then there are but few real Christians in the world. If every one who has learned the dialect of Christianity, and who can talk like a saint; if every one

who has gifts and parts, and who can make shift to preach, pray, or discourse like a Christian: in a word, if all such as associate with the people of God and partake of ordinances may pass for Christians, then indeed the number is great. But alas! how few can he found, if you judge them by this rule,—how few are there who conscientiously keep their hearts, watch their thoughts and look scrupulously to their motives! Indeed there are few closet-men among professors. It is easier for men to be reconciled to any other duties in religion than to these. The profane part of the world will not so much as meddle with the outside of any religious duties, and least of all with these; and as to the hypocrite, though he may be very particular in externals, you can never persuade him to undertake this inward, this difficult work; this work, to which there is no inducement from human applause; this work, which would quickly discover what the hypocrite cares not to know: so that by general consent this heart-work is left to the hands of a few retired ones, and I tremble to think in how few hands it is.

2. If the keeping of the heart be so important a business; if such great advantages result from it; if so many valuable interests be wrapt up in it, then let me call upon the people of God every where to engage heartily in this work. O study your hearts, watch your hearts, keep your hearts! Away with fruitless controversies and all idle questions; away with empty names and vain shows; away with unprofitable discourse and bold censures of others, and turn in upon yourselves. O that this day, this hour, you would resolve upon doing so!

Reader, methinks I shall prevail with you. All that I beg for is this, that you would step aside oftener to talk with God and your own heart; that you would not suffer every trifle to divert you; that you would keep a more true and faithful account of your thoughts and affections; that you would seriously demand of your own heart at least every evening, ‘O my heart, where hast thou been today, and what has engaged thy thoughts?’

If all that has been said by way of inducement be not enough, I have yet some motives to offer you:

(1). The studying, observing, and diligently keeping your own heart, will surprisingly help you to understand the deep mysteries

of religion. An honest, well-experienced heart is an excellent help to the head. Such a heart will serve for a commentary on a great part of the Scriptures. By means of such a heart you will have a better understanding of divine things than the most learned (graceless) man ever had, or can have; you will not only have a clearer, but a more interesting and profitable apprehension of them. A man may discourse orthodoxly and profoundly of the nature and effects of faith, the troubles and comforts of conscience, and the sweetness of communion with God, who never felt the efficacy and sweet impression of these things upon his own soul. But how dark and dry are his notions compared with those of an experienced Christian!

(2). The study and observation of your own heart will powerfully secure you against the dangerous and infecting errors of the times in which you live. For what think you is the reason why so many professors have departed from the faith, giving heed to fables? why have so many been led away by the error of the wicked? why have those who have sown corrupt doctrines had such plentiful harvests among us, but because they have met with a race of professors who never knew what belongs to practical godliness and the study and keeping of their hearts?

(3). Your care and diligence in keeping your heart will prove one of the best evidences of your sincerity. I know no external act of religion which truly distinguishes the sound from the unsound professor. It is marvellous how far hypocrites go in all external duties; how plausibly they can order the outward man, hiding all their indecencies from the observation of the world. But they take no heed to their hearts; they are not in secret what they appear to be in public; and before this test no hypocrite can stand. They may, indeed, in a fit of terror, or on a death-bed, cry out of the wickedness of their hearts; but such extorted complaints are worthy of no regard. No credit, in law, is to be given to the testimony of one upon the rack, because it may be supposed that the extremity of his torture will make him say any thing to get relief. But if self-jealousy, care and watchfulness be the daily workings and frames of your heart, you have some evidence of your sincerity.

(4). How comfortable and how profitable would all ordinances

and duties be to you, if your heart was faithfully kept. What lively communion might you have with God every time you approach him, if your heart was in a right frame! You might then say with David, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet." It is the indisposition of the heart which renders ordinances, and secret duties so comfortless to some. They strive to raise their hearts to God, now pressing this argument upon them, then that, to quicken and affect them; yet they often get nearly through the exercise before their hearts begin to be interested in it; and some times they go away no better than they came. But the Christian whose heart is prepared by being constantly kept, enters immediately and heartily into his duties; he outstrips his sluggish neighbour, gets the first sight of Christ in a sermon, the first seal from Christ in a sacrament, the first communication of grace and love in secret prayer. Now if there be any thing valuable and comfortable in ordinances and private duties, look to your heart and keep it, I beseech you.

(5). An acquaintance with your own heart will furnish you a fountain of matter in prayer. The man who is diligent in heart-work, will be richly supplied with matter in his addresses to God. He will not be confused for want of thoughts; his tongue will not falter for want of expressions.

(6). The most desirable thing in the world, viz, the revival of religion among a people, may be effected by means of what I am urging upon you.

O that I might see the time when professors shall not walk in a vain show; when they shall please themselves no more with a name to live, while they are spiritually dead; when they shall be no more a company of frothy, vain persons; but when holiness shall shine in their conversation, and awe the world, and command reverence from all that are around them; when they shall warm the heart of those who come near them, and cause it to be said, God is in these men of a truth. And may such a time be expected? Until heart-work becomes the business of professors, I have no hope of seeing a time so blessed! Does it not grieve you to see how religion is contemned and trampled under foot, and the professors of it ridiculed and scorned in the world? Professors, would you recover your credit? would you obtain an honourable testimony in the consciences of

your very enemies? Then keep your hearts.

(7). By diligence in keeping our hearts we should prevent the occasions of fatal scandals and stumbling-blocks to the world. Woe to the world because of offences!

Keep your heart faithfully, and you will be prepared for any situation or service to which you may be called. This, and this only can properly fit you for usefulness in any station; but with this you can endure prosperity or adversity; you can deny yourself, and turn your hand to any work. Thus Paul turned every circumstance to good account, and made himself so eminently useful. When he preached to others, he provided against being cast away himself: he kept his heart; and every thing in which he excelled seems to have had a close connection with his diligence in keeping his heart.

(8). If the people of God would diligently keep their hearts, their communion with each other would be unspeakably more inviting and profitable. Then "how goodly would be thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" It is the fellowship which the people of God have with the Father and with the Son that kindles the desires of others to have communion with them. I tell you, that if saints would be persuaded to spend more time and take more pains about their hearts, there would soon be such a divine excellence in their conversation that others would account it no small privilege to be with or near them. It is the pride, passion and earthliness of our hearts, that has spoiled Christian fellowship. Why is it that when Christians meet they are often jarring and contending, but because their passions are unmortified? Whence come their uncharitable censures of their brethren, but from their ignorance of themselves? Why are they so rigid and unfeeling toward those who have fallen, but because they do not feel their own weakness and liability to temptation? Why is their discourse so light and unprofitable when they meet, but because their hearts are earthly and vain? But now, if Christians would study their hearts more and keep them better, the beauty and glory of communion would be restored. They would divide no more, contend no more, censure rashly no more. They will feel right one toward another, when each is daily humbled under a sense of the evil of his own heart.

(9). Lastly, Keep your heart, and then the comforts of the Spirit

and the influence of all ordinances will be more fixed and lasting than they now are. "And do the consolations of God seem small to you?" Ah, you have reason to be ashamed that the ordinances of God, as to their quickening and comforting effects, should make so light and transient an impression on your heart.

Now, reader, consider well these special benefits of keeping the heart which I have mentioned. Examine their importance. Are they small matters? Is it a small matter to have your understanding assisted? your endangered soul rendered safe? your sincerity proved? your communion with God sweetened? your heart filled with matter for prayer? Is it a small thing to have the power of godliness? all fatal scandals removed? an instrumental fitness to serve Christ obtained? the communion of saints restored to its primitive glory? and the influence of ordinances abiding in the souls of saints? If these are no common blessings, no ordinary benefits, then surely it is a great and in dispensable duty to keep the heart with all diligence.

And now are you inclined to undertake the business of keeping your heart? are you resolved upon it? I charge you, then, to engage in it earnestly. Away with every cowardly feeling, and make up your mind to encounter difficulties. Draw your armour from the word of God. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in its commands, its promises, its threatenings; let it be fixed in your understanding, your memory, your conscience, your affections. You must learn to wield the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God) familiarly, if you would defend your heart and conquer your enemies. You must call yourself frequently to an account; examine yourself as in the presence of the all seeing God; bring your conscience, as it were, to the bar of judgment. Beware how you plunge yourself into a multiplicity of worldly business; how you practise upon the maxims of the world; and how you venture at all to indulge your depraved propensities. You must exercise the utmost vigilance to discover and check the first symptoms of departure from God, the least decline of spirituality, or the least indisposition to meditation by yourself and holy conversation and fellowship with others. These things you must undertake, in the strength of Christ, with invincible resolution in the outset. And if

you thus engage in this great work, he assured you shall not spend your strength for naught; comforts which you never felt or thought of will flow in upon you from every side. The diligent prosecution of this work will constantly afford you the most powerful excitements to vigilance and ardour in the life of faith, while it increases your strength and wears out your enemies. And when you have kept your heart with all diligence a little while; when you have fought the battles of this spiritual warfare, gained the ascendancy over the corruptions within, and vanquished the enemies without, then God will open the gate of heaven to you, and give you the portion which is promised to them that overcome. Awake then, this moment; get the world under your feet, pant not for the things which a man may have, and eternally lose his soul; but bless God that you may have his service here, and the glory hereafter which he appoints to his chosen.

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

The second of two booklets.

