

An Introduction to John Wesley's Abridgement of Jonathan Edwards's *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*¹

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An Opening Word on Terminology

It should be noted at the outset of the reader's engaging with this eighteenth-century document that terminology about the inner life—'affections', 'feelings', 'emotions', 'tempers', etc.—has undergone many changes in the years since Edwards and Wesley wrote. Several scholars have noted this evolution and have made clear how appreciating that change can affect our understanding of what Edwards and Wesley meant by the 'heart' and its components. Without commenting on all of this important recent scholarship on affectivity here, let me simply caution the reader of this *Treatise* that you will not understand what is set forth here if you start with the nineteenth- and twentieth-century assumptions that 'affections' (or our more typically modern term 'emotions') are simply reducible to 'feelings' and that they are separate from our intellectual processes.

Thankfully, sophisticated analyses of affectivity have started appearing, especially in the last 20 years, that give us a more nuanced vocabulary for and appreciation of the inner life. This has been of immense help in seeking to understand what people like Edwards and Wesley were saying about the 'heart'. If one is interested in this historical development, I recommend the work of Thomas Dixon, who has made clear the nature of the (distorting) historical change in vocabulary in his *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*.²

Additionally, the work of many twenty-first-century philosophers has helped to capture a more well-rounded view of the integrity of 'emotions', correcting the distortions that Dixon has traced. These thinkers have helped us to see how the affections are tied up with the whole person and how they provide key insights into one's intellectual commitments—theological and otherwise. Important works in this field include Martha Nussbaum's *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (2001) and Robert Roberts' *Emotions: An Essay in Moral Psychology*. (2003).³

Suffice it to say that for Edwards and Wesley (similar to Aquinas in his use of the term *affectus*), the 'affections' represents a swathe of life that is indispensable if we are to understand a person. This understanding of 'heart religion' was not the kind of *ur* phenomenon that F. D. E. Schleiermacher was positing in his 'feeling of absolute dependence'—a kind of universal depth-dimension available to all,

¹Some of what follows originally appeared in a paper presented to the Bicentennial Consultation of the United Methodist Church held at Emory University in 1983, which was subsequently published in a collection of papers presented at this conference called *Wesleyan Theology Today* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 416–23. A version of that paper also appeared in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19.2 (Fall 1984): 77–89; and as a chapter in my book *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and their Role in the Christian Life and Theology* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1989).

²New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

³See my book *The Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church: John Wesley's Heart Religion in the 21st Century* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010); especially Chapter Three, where I analyze several of these works and apply these insights to Wesley's understanding of the heart and its affections.

regardless of one's religious tradition.⁴ Schleiermacher's vision of Christianity, where the individual's experience is seen as the proper starting point for theology, is what earned Schleiermacher the title of 'father of modern theology'. A critique of this subjective starting point was subsequently put forth by many, including Ludwig Feuerbach in his *The Essence of Christianity*.⁵ But this emphasis on sheer, unformed subjectivity is quite a different understanding from the emphasis that Edwards and Wesley put on the affections, so we must not see this work through those nineteenth-century lenses.

The view of Edwards and Wesley is, instead, the call for a very contingent pattern of affectivity to be formed through contact with the message of the Christian gospel. Truly encountering the gospel calls forth a specific pattern of response—the 'religious affections'. These include, among others, filial fear and awe toward God, sorrow for one's sins, love of God and neighbor, and joy in our salvation as well as in the flourishing of others. Understanding the 'affections' of a person tells us what that person values, as well as how their self-identity and current circumstances all work together to create that global evaluation that we call 'happiness'.

To say, as Edwards and Wesley assert in this document, that 'true religion consists in great part of religious affections',⁶ is to make a profound theological assertion that will be misunderstood if we see affections as reducible to mere bodily states—passing sensations or 'feelings'. With parallels to the thought of later writers such as Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Lindbeck, Edwards and Wesley are saying that Christianity is, at its core, a way of life. They make it clear that if a certain set of emotional capacities have not been developed—and regularly demonstrated, not just as bursts of feeling but in the whole shape of their lives—then such people have not fully appropriated the Christian message.

Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards (d. 1758) was born in East Windsor, Connecticut, in the year of John Wesley's birth, 1703. Educated at Yale, he had a lifelong fascination with both philosophy and natural science as well as theology. Locke and Newton were his intellectual companions every bit as much as was Calvin. Such interests were reflected in his writings as well as his readings, as seen in his papers titled 'Of Insects', 'The Mind', and even 'Of Being'.⁷

While *Freedom of the Will* (1754) is usually taken to be his major contribution to theology, Edwards is more widely known for his sermon 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God', with its vivid depiction of the end that awaits the reprobate. Unfortunately, neither *Freedom of the Will* nor his sermon give a true picture of the broad scope and creative nature of his work. Edwards was much more concerned with beauty and love than he was with either humanity's bondage to sin or the nature of hell.⁸ It is these

⁴See Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre*, first published in Germany in 1830. A modern translation is *The Christian Faith* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1976).

⁵First published in German in 1841, English translation 1893. The great Swiss theologian Karl Barth also criticized Schleiermacher's experience-based approach to theology throughout his *The Epistle to the Romans* (1921) and his magisterial *Church Dogmatics* (1932–67).

⁶Edwards declared this at the start of Part I of his *Treatise on Religious Affections*. This work was first published in Boston in 1746; all quotes will be from volume 2 of the Yale University Press edition of his *Works* (1959; hereafter *TRA*). The identical phrase was adopted by Wesley (see page 181 below).

⁷Cf. *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, volume 6 of his *Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

⁸Actually, there are fewer than a dozen imprecatory sermons written by Edwards to be found among the more than a thousand which survive in manuscript form. See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (Garden City: Image Books, 1975), 370.

wider interests that are most relevant for our concerns.

Roland Delattre, in his *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards*, claims that Edwards understood Divine Being to be most immediately and powerfully present to humanity as beauty.⁹ This beauty is known through our sensibility; i.e., it is *felt*, and not merely intellectually inferred by the understanding. Saving knowledge of God, then, is available only in and through the enjoyment of God. The fullness of God is encountered as a living reality ‘only according to the degree to which men find in [God] their entire joy and happiness, the fulfillment of their aesthetic-affectional being’.¹⁰

This emphasis on the sensible apprehension of God, when linked with Edwards’s appreciation for the philosophy of John Locke, has been taken by some of Edwards’s interpreters as showing that Edwards’s epistemology was nothing more than philosophical empiricism.¹¹ But Terrence Erdt has shown that a ‘sense of the heart’ or a ‘sweetness’ (*suavitas*) can be found even in Calvin’s thought, so that Edwards’s emphasis on feeling and the ‘heart’ has a rootage in the *theological* tradition which is deeper than is often suspected.¹² Regardless of its historical roots, Edwards’s affectional ‘sense of the heart’ was at the center of his psychology, epistemology, ethics, and indeed his whole theology.

Wesley and Edwards

It was Edwards’s theoretical concern with the nature of religious experience, and more importantly his burning practical desire to have such experience widely propagated, that put Edwards and Wesley on common ground. Wesley’s first contact with Edwards’s writings came in 1738. Wesley was traveling from London to Oxford when he ‘read the truly surprising narrative of the conversions lately wrought in and about the town of Northampton, in New England. Surely “this is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes”’.¹³

What Wesley read was *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*,¹⁴ which was to be the first of five works of Edwards that Wesley would abridge and publish.¹⁵ The other four works also had direct bearing on the subjects of Christian experience and evangelism. These were *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (orig., 1741; JW’s abridgement, 1744); *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742 / 1745); *The Life of David Brainerd*, who was Edwards’s son-in-law and a missionary to the Indians (1749 / 1768); and the *Treatise on Religious Affections* (1746 / 1773).

⁹New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968, 50. Delattre’s analysis is based on all of Edwards’s works, but he draws most heavily on the *Treatise on Religious Affections*, *The Nature of True Virtue*, and the *Miscellanies* (volumes 13, 18, 20 and 23 in the Yale series of Edwards’s *Works*).

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 49.

¹¹An influential exponent of this view was Perry Miller, especially in his *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Wm. Stoane Associates, 1949).

¹²See his *Jonathan Edwards: Art and the Sense of the Heart* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); especially Chapter 1, ‘The Calvinist Psychology of the Heart’.

¹³JW, *Journal*, Oct. 14, 1738 (*Works*, 19:16).

¹⁴The full title continues: *in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton and the Neighboring Towns and Villages of New Hampshire in New England*; published originally in 1736 (JW’s abridgement was issued in 1744).

¹⁵For commentary on the abridgements, as well as an enlightening comparison of Wesley and Edwards, see Charles Rogers, ‘John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards’, *The Duke Divinity School Review* 31 (1966): 20–38.

These five works by Edwards represent the largest number of separate works by one author that Wesley was to abridge and publish under his own name.¹⁶ The influence of Edwards on Wesley was so strong that Albert C. Outler has said that Edwards was a ‘major source’ of Wesley’s theology, and that Wesley’s encounter with Edwards’s early writings was one of four basic factors that set the frame for Wesley’s thought.¹⁷

This is not to say that there were no important differences between the two, for there were. Wesley was familiar with Edwards’s *Freedom of the Will*; but rather than publishing an abridgement, he attacked the views contained in it in his ‘Thoughts Upon Necessity’.¹⁸ Wesley thought that Edwards’s denial of human freedom made nonsense of the moral life. In general, anything that smacked of Calvinistic ‘irresistible grace’ or ‘unconditional election’ Wesley was careful to excise from his abridgements of Edwards’s work.

Edwards also had his disagreements with Wesley. In fact, the only record of Edwards referring to Wesley was a disparaging remark about Wesley’s views on perfection.¹⁹ If one were to give an irenic reading of their differences, one might say that while Wesley and Edwards affirmed the sovereignty of God, Edwards expressed this sovereignty through his Calvinist doctrines of predestination and the bondage of the will, and Wesley expressed it by emphasizing prevenient grace and the perfecting possibilities of the Spirit. Both the continuities and the differences between these two men can be seen in microcosm in Wesley’s abridgement of Edwards’s most widely read book, his *Treatise on Religious Affections*.

Wesley’s Abridgement of Edwards’s *Treatise*

The task of discerning a man’s views by looking at how he abridged another man’s work must be approached with caution. Frank Baker has commented that one of the ways that Wesley dealt with a ‘dangerous’ book was by publishing an expurgated version of it.²⁰ This might lead one to believe that Wesley’s version of the *Treatise on Religious Affections* was merely the lesser of two evils: since the book was already in print, Wesley may have thought that it would be better if his followers read his version rather than Edwards’s (if they had to read it at all). If this were the case, the abridgement would be less an endorsement of Edwards’s views and more a hostile toleration of them.

Doubts about attributing the views stated in the abridgement to the abridger are reinforced when it is noted that some books appeared in Wesley’s *Christian Library* which contained views contradicting his own. But this is less of a problem than it first appears to be, for the inclusion of these offending passages was the result of the haste with which Wesley produced the *Library*. His personal copy of the *Christian Library* contains multiple manuscript corrections or elisions of these sections; many of which were incorporated by Thomas Jackson in 1827 when a second edition of the *Library* was issued.²¹

¹⁶See Frank Baker, ‘The Beginnings of American Methodism’, *Methodist History* 2.1 (Oct. 1963), 9.

¹⁷Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 16. The other three factors, according to Outler, were his Aldersgate conversion, his disenchantment with Moravianism and his vital reappropriation of his Anglican heritage.

¹⁸See *Works*, 13:557–66.

¹⁹Quoted in Rogers, ‘John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards’, 36.

²⁰Frank Baker, ‘A Study of John Wesley’s Readings’, *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 168 (1943), 240.

²¹See T.W. Herbert, *John Wesley as Editor and Author* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940) 26–27.

The best warrant for taking Wesley's abridgement of Edwards's *Treatise* as representing Wesley's own views is his specific endorsement of the book. Wesley did not always write a preface for the books that he published, but in the case of the *Treatise* he did. In this preface, he both distances himself from some parts of the original *Treatise* and recommends the portion he retained. The end of this preface reads 'Out of this dangerous heap, wherein much wholesome food is mixed with much deadly poison, I have selected many remarks and admonitions which may be of great use to the children of God. May God write them in the hearts of all that desire to walk as Christ also walked!'²² The remainder of this introduction will be an overview of what Wesley considered poison and what he considered food.

What Wesley Deleted

Determining what Wesley left out of the *Treatise* is more difficult than one might first suspect, since Wesley did not work from the original edition. John E. Smith has determined that Wesley worked from an abridgement made by William Gordon, published in London in 1762. Gordon, an 'independent' or dissenting minister in England, reduced the text by more than one third, omitted many notes and rewriting the text in hundreds of places.²³

In this brief introduction I will not attempt to chronicle every change that Gordon made to Edwards's original text, or to note every small change that Wesley made to Gordon's text. My main purpose is to help readers understand the end product of Wesley's abridging. So I will limit myself to a few general remarks about Gordon's abridgement, and Wesley's deletions, before moving on to consider what Wesley wanted to preserve and share from the book.

First of all, while he did remove much of the original text, Gordon's appreciation of Edwards was much less critical than Wesley's. The original *Treatise* consisted of a preface and three major parts: Part I, concerning the nature of the affections; Part II, containing 12 signs that *cannot* be used to judge whether or not particular affections are gracious; and Part III, which details 12 distinguishing signs of 'Truly Gracious and Holy Affections'. Gordon retained the four basic parts of the work, and in Parts II and III both sets of 12 signs were fully represented. His excisions and revisions, which apparently occurred most often when he determined that Edwards was 'too refined for common capacities',²⁴ do not pervert the essential thrust of Edwards's work.

Wesley was a more ruthless editor. While Gordon's abridgement retained about two-thirds of the original, Wesley's was reduced to one-sixth the size of Edwards's publication. He cut not only Edwards's preface, but the second, third, and fourth of the twelve signs of Part III in their entirety; as well as considerably reducing the explanations of the remaining signs. Edwards's final sign (XII) was for some reason not numbered by Wesley, though he included much of the content of this sign at the end of his discussion of the previous sign. These changes meant that there are only 8 numbered sub-sections of Part III instead of Edwards's 12.

Most of the omissions that Wesley made fall into one of two categories, both of which are alluded to in Wesley's preface. These two categories of elided material might be defined as: 1) that judged Calvinistic, and 2) that judged overly 'subtle'.

As he made clear in his preface, Wesley thought that Edwards's purpose in writing the *Treatise* was to show that backsliders were never true believers in the first place. In other words, Wesley saw the *Treatise* as a Calvinistic tract on the perseverance of the saints. Wesley claimed that Edwards's attempt to defend such an indefensible doctrine led him to heap together 'so many curious, subtle, metaphysical

²²See below, 178–79. It is also significant that JW's abridgement appeared (for the first and only time during his life) in his own collected *Works* (Bristol: Pine, 1773), 23:177–279.

²³See Smith, 'Editor's Introduction' to *TRA*, 79.

²⁴See Gordon's abridgement, 78, footnote.

distinctions as are sufficient to puzzle the brain and confound the intellects of all the plain men and women of the universe; and to make them doubt of, if not wholly deny, all the work which God had wrought in their souls.’²⁵ After this broadside, Wesley goes on to admit, as quoted above, that there is much wholesome food mixed in with the ‘deadly poison’.

As others have pointed out, Wesley misunderstood Edwards’s purpose in writing the *Treatise*.²⁶ Edwards was trying to show valid signs for distinguishing true from false piety or ‘religion’, not primarily to explain away the appearance of backsliding. Wesley might justifiably be accused of being defensive here, seeing Edwards’s Calvinism operating where it really was not. True, Edwards does mention the ‘elect’ in a few places, and other Calvinistic tendencies which Wesley altered can surely be seen in the original. But Wesley’s preface mischaracterizes the tenor of the *Treatise* as polemical, when it is in fact primarily constructive. Since Wesley was caught-up in heated debate with the Calvinists at the time of the abridgement, his defensiveness can at least be understood, if not justified.²⁷

The most substantive passages that Wesley omitted from the *Treatise*, however, are not the overtly Calvinistic ones, but the overly ‘subtle’ ones which Wesley said ‘puzzle’ and ‘confound’ plain-thinking humanity (echoing Gordon’s claim, quoted above, that at times Edwards was ‘too refined for common capacities’.) Wesley shared Edwards’s interest in science and philosophy, but edification was Wesley’s ultimate criterion when evaluating the written word. Edwards was a brilliant speculative thinker who incorporated many of his philosophical theories into his theological works. Because of this, Wesley encountered much that could be dispensed with. This can be seen especially in two of the three signs that Wesley omitted.

The second of Edwards’s twelve signs states that the ‘first objective ground of gracious affections is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things’;²⁸ the third sign says that holy affections are founded on the ‘loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things’.²⁹ In these two signs we see the metaphysics of ‘beauty’ and ‘excellence’ which Delattre has declared to be the lynch-pin of Edwards’s speculations. Wesley was probably content with Edwards’s point (made in many other places) that divine things are the object—the conscious focus-points of the heart and mind—of gracious affections, making extended discussions of the ‘loveliness’ or ‘moral excellency’ of these divine things dispensable.

Conjecture about why Wesley deleted the fourth sign is more difficult, for it asserts something which Wesley would not want to deny, the intellectual component in the affections (‘Gracious affections do arise from the mind’s being enlightened, rightly and spiritually, to understand or apprehend divine things.’³⁰) Certainly Wesley was never tempted, as Luther was, to ‘tear-out the eyes of reason’ in order to promote faith. One can only guess that Wesley considered this sign to go too far in the other direction; i.e., that it could be taken as a kind of rationalism. In this brief volume Wesley may have thought that there was not enough space for a sign that might give some support to those who advocated a mere ‘head’ religion which bypassed the heart.

²⁵See p. 178 below.

²⁶See Smith’s Introduction in *TRA*, 80; and Rogers, ‘John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards’, 30.

²⁷See John Allen Knight, ‘Aspects of Wesley’s Theology After 1770’, *Methodist History* 6.3 (Apr. 1968): 33–42.

²⁸*TRA*, 240.

²⁹*TRA*, 253.

³⁰*TRA*, 266.

What Wesley Retained

At the beginning of Part I Edwards quotes the text of 1 Peter 1:8: ‘Whom having not seen ye . In whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.’ In this text Edwards sees the two archetypal exercises of true religion: love to Christ and joy in Christ. Based on this, he then formulates the proposition that he will defend throughout the entire book—that ‘True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections’ (181³¹). His first step in this process is to define what affections are.

According to Edwards, the ‘affections of the mind’ are ‘the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the will’ (181). In drawing this out, Edwards goes on to say that God has imbued the soul with two faculties: the understanding, which is capable of perception and speculation; and the inclination or will, which either is pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting the things perceived. The mind, with regard to the exercises of the will, is called the heart. The crucial point here is that the affections are not exercised apart from the understanding.

Edwards makes his anthropology even more explicit when he says that it is the mind and not the body that is the proper seat of the affections. Herein lies the difference between affections and passions as well. Passions are more sudden, have a more violent effect on the ‘animal spirits’, and in them ‘the mind is less in its own command’ (183).

The next section of Part I consists of several points attempting to show that a great part of true religion lies in the affections. These range from arguments based on observations of human behavior (‘affections are the springs of men’s actions’, 185), to arguments based strictly on Scripture (‘Holy Scripture places religion in the affections’, 185–86, and ‘The Scriptures place the sin of the heart much in hardness of heart’, 190), to more speculative arguments (‘The religion of heaven consists much in affection’, 190). From these and other arguments, Edwards draws these inferences:

- 1) That we cannot discard all religious affections (191).
- 2) That ‘such means are to be desired, as have a tendency to move the affections’ (192).
- 3) That ‘if true religion lies much in the affections, what cause have we to be ashamed, that we are no more affected with the great things of religion!’ (193) In other words, we are to be held morally and spiritually accountable for having certain affectional capacities.

This leads to Part II.³² Having established the connections between true religion and the affections in Part I, Edwards moves on to the theme that occupies the largest part of the book: distinguishing the holy and gracious affections from those that are not. Part II is a discussion of 12 ‘signs’ that *cannot* give certain knowledge as to whether or not affections are ‘truly gracious’. While some of their contemporaries have apparently taken these to be unmistakable indicators of true holiness, Edwards and Wesley say that they must be treated skeptically and seen as neither proof of holiness nor evidence of a false piety.

One can imagine the sobering effect that these negative points must have had on many of the ‘spirit-filled Christians’ of Edwards’s (and Wesley’s) day. Among the most interesting of the ‘signs’ which are *not* necessarily indicative of grace are points number: 1) that religious affections are raised very high (195); 2) that they have great effects on the body (197); 4) that the persons did not make the affections themselves (202–3); and 5) that they come with texts of Scripture (206). Point number 3 can serve as a warning to all garrulous theologians of any age: that it is no sign to be fluent, fervent, and abundant in talking of the things of religion (201).

³¹This and subsequent parenthetical page references refer to JW’s abridged version as reproduced below.

³²Since Wesley retained all twelve points of Part II found in both Edwards and Gordon, the numerical references made here apply to all three editions, though the text for each of the twelve signs is typically greatly reduced in Wesley’s version.

The final four signs, when seen together, show that, for Edwards, we can never know how another person's soul is seen by God from observing their outward behavior. People can spend much time in religion and worship (215), praise God with their mouths (216), be confident that their experience is divine (217), or convince other people of their godliness (228) without being assured that their affections are gracious. This makes an important point about the entire *Treatise*. It is to be an aid for one's own spiritual quest, not a guidebook for the judgment of others.

Part III of the *Treatise* is perhaps the most important section, for this is where Edwards explains what *are* valid signs of gracious and holy affections.³³ Edwards's first sign (W I) is that gracious affections arise from 'spiritual, divine and supernatural' influences on the heart (230). The Spirit of God gives the believer a new 'spiritual sense' (233) through which one has access to the divine things.

Edwards's fifth sign (W II) states that gracious affections are accompanied by a conviction of the reality and certainty of divine things. This view is directly in line with Wesley's famous emphasis on 'assurance'.³⁴ This conviction is not some sort of vague mysticism. It is instead a 'conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel' (234). The title of the *Treatise* may sound as if the book is about generic religious experience, but in reality the positivity of the Christian religion is constantly and unashamedly asserted. We can also see here the intellectual nature, and object-relatedness, of the affections for Edwards and Wesley, as these affections are contingent experiences that result from hearing and living the Christian gospel, not vague, unfocused, and generic mystical experiences that can be dredged up from the interiority of any human being.

Edwards's sixth sign (W III) states that gracious affections are attended with 'evangelical humiliation', i.e., a conviction of one's own 'utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness, with an answerable frame of heart, arising from a discovery of God's holiness' (238). On this point it is flatly put that: 'They that are destitute of this, have not true religion, whatever profession they may make' (239). For Edwards (as for Wesley), humility is pervasive; it is a quality of all the other affections, and therein lies an important safeguard against 'enthusiasm'.

The material contained in the seventh sign in the original (W IV) is treated in just a few paragraphs by Wesley. This is perhaps because this sign simply states that gracious affections are attended with a change in the nature of the affected person, which is already implied in several of the other signs (e.g. numbers 6 (W III), 8 (W V), and 9 (W VI)).

The eighth (W V) and ninth (W VI) signs show that while false affections have a tendency to harden the heart, truly gracious affections promote the spirit that appeared in Christ (#8), a tenderness of spirit (#9). In these sections, Edwards lays special emphasis on love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness, and mercy. From the very beginning, of course, Edwards has said that love is the first and chief of the affections—the 'fountain' of all gracious affections (187)—but it is not until this eighth sign that we are given an overall view of what specific additional affections are, in fact, 'religious'.

The tenth sign (W VII) is that gracious affections have beautiful symmetry and proportion. While there are echoes here of Edwards's philosophical contention that we know God through beauty, there is also something more important being stressed. In saying, for example, that love of God must be yoked with love of man, or that having hope does not mean jettisoning holy fear, Edwards is laying out his own 'grammar' of the affections, his view of how these affections form and determine the shape of the human

³³Unlike in Part II, where Wesley retained all 12 sub-headings, in Part III he reduced the sub-headings or 'signs' from 12 to 8, numbered in Roman numerals. To make the references clear, I will refer to the signs by Edwards's original enumeration, followed by the equivalent number in Wesley's abridgement in parentheses with preceded by W. For example, 'Edwards's fifth sign (W II).

³⁴See JW, Sermon 10, 'The Witness of the Spirit, I'; Sermon 11, 'The Witness of the Spirit, II'; and Sermon 12, 'The Witness of Our Own Spirit'; in *Works*, 1:267–313.

life and how they interact with each other. The elucidation of this ‘grammar’ could be seen as the main theological task of the entire *Treatise*.

The eleventh sign (W VIII) states that gracious affections increase the longing for spiritual attainments while the false affections tend to make one rest satisfied. This can be seen as a corrective against those who might think that Edwards is about cultivating religious experiences for their own sake, cut-off from any outward expression.

This theme reaches its culmination in the twelfth and final sign where the emphasis is shifted completely away from inner experience to the necessary fruits of the affections: works of love. Curiously, this twelfth and final sign in Edwards’s (and Gordon’s abridgement), the explanation of which is by far the longest of the twelve in the original, Wesley does not number separately but merely appends to the end of Edwards’s sign XI (W VIII). Wesley does, however, retain a lot of the material in this final section, saying ‘Lastly, gracious affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice’ (259). Here he shares many arguments for Christian practice as the chief of all the evidences of a ‘saving sincerity’ in religion.

So much is practice emphasized here that Edwards feels compelled to answer two objections that might arise regarding the importance of the works: the objection that Christian experience is to be the central sign of grace, and that emphasizing works could lead to a works righteousness. Edwards smoothly answers these objections by showing that ‘experience’ and ‘practice’ cannot be separated, and that making a ‘righteousness’ of experience is just as heretical as a works righteousness. Wesley retains the essence of this material (272ff). Indeed, in the Pine edition of his *Works* Wesley inserted asterisks at the beginning of paragraphs that he thought particularly important. There are seven such paragraphs in this abridgement. One group of these focuses primarily on questions relating to the witness of the Spirit and assurance; see pp. 221, 223, 224 (2), 225, 227 (2). The second group, found on pages 276 and 277, are concerned with making clear that emphasizing practice as a sign of truly religious affections is something quite different than preaching a gospel of works righteousness. As he says, our works are the *sign* of God’s favor, not the *price* of God’s favor (276).

Conclusions

Wesley’s abridgement of Edwards’s *Treatise on the Religious Affections* captures what Wesley meant when he said that true religion consists, in great part, of religious affections. We find in it all of the major themes of Wesley’s heart-centered theology, as seen in the works deemed normative for the Methodist movement—*The Standard Sermons* and his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*. These themes include: the close relationship between reason and emotion; the constant check against self-deception; the transitive (or object-centered) nature of the affections; the non-equivalence of affections with feelings or sensations; the central importance of the love of, and joy in, God; and finally, the dispositional nature of the emotions, shown by the fact that the truly Christian affections compel the believer to live constructively in the social world. As Wesley emphasized through his life in his doctrine of sanctification,³⁵ if the love of God is not evidenced in the social lives of those who claim sanctity, then their affections are not, in fact, truly gracious.

³⁵See, for instance, JW Sermon 17, ‘The Circumcision of the Heart’, *Works*, 1:401–14; and his 13 sermon series on the Sermon on the Mount (#21–33) in *Works*, 1:466–698.

An Extract from
A Treatise concerning Religious Affections

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[178²]

To the Reader

1. The design of Mr. Edwards, in the treatise from which the following extract is made, seems to have been (chiefly, if not altogether) to serve his hypothesis. In three preceding tracts, he had given an account of a glorious work in New England—of abundance of sinners of every sort and degree, who were in a short time converted to God. But in a few years, a considerable part of these “turned back as a dog to the vomit.” What was the plain inference to be drawn from this? Why, that a true believer may “make shipwreck of the faith.” How then could he evade the force of this? Truly by eating his own words, and proving (as well as the nature of the thing would bear) that they were no believers at all!

2. In order to this, he heaps together so many curious, subtle, metaphysical distinctions as are sufficient to puzzle the brain and confound the intellects of all the plain men and women in the universe, and to make them doubt of, if not wholly deny, all the work which God had wrought in their souls.

3. Out of this dangerous heap, wherein much wholesome food is mixed with much deadly poison, I have selected many remarks and admonitions, which may be of great use to the children of God. [179] May God write them in the hearts of all that desire to walk as Christ also walked!

Bristol
Sept. 1, 1773

PART I.

**Concerning the Nature of the Affections,
and their Importance in Religion.**

“Whom having not seen ye love. In whom, though now ye see him not,
yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” 1 Peter
1: 8.

In these words, the apostle represents the state of mind of the Christians to whom he wrote, under the persecutions they then suffered. These persecutions are what he has respect to in the two preceding verses, when he speaks of “the trial of their faith,” and of “their being in heaviness through manifold temptations.”

Such trials are of three-fold benefit to true religion.

1. The truth of it is manifested by them. They, above all things, have a tendency to distinguish between true and false religion. [180]

2. They serve to discover its *beauty* and amiableness. True virtue never appears so lovely, as

¹The extract appeared in *Works* (Pine) 23:177–279

²Page numbering indicates the beginning of the page so numbered.

when it is most oppressed. And the excellency of Christianity is never exhibited with such advantage, as when under the greatest trials.

3. They purify it from evil mixtures. They increase its beauty, by freeing it from those things that obscured its glory.

In the text³ the apostle observes how religion operated in those he wrote to, under their persecutions, whereby these benefits of persecution appeared. And there are two kinds of exercise in them he takes notice of, wherein the above-mentioned benefits appeared.

1. *Love to Christ*, “whom having not seen ye love.” The world wondered what a principle it was that influenced them to expose themselves to so great sufferings. There was nothing visible that could induce them thus to suffer, and could carry them through such trials. But though there was nothing that the world saw, or that they themselves saw with their bodily eyes, that thus supported them, yet they had a supernatural principle of love to something *unseen*. They loved Jesus Christ, whom they saw spiritually.

2. *Joy in Christ*. Though their outward sufferings were grievous, their inward joys were greater.

There are two things which the apostle takes notice of concerning this joy. 1) The manner in which it rises, the way in which Christ, though [181] unseen, is the foundation of it—*viz.*, by faith: “in whom, though now ye see him not, yet *believing*, ye rejoice.” 2) The nature of it, “unspeakable and full of glory.” *Unspeakable* in its *kind*, being supernatural and divine, and so ineffably excellent; the sublimity and excellent sweetness of which there were no words to set forth. [“Unspeakable”] in its *degree*, it pleasing God to give them this holy joy in a large measure in their state of persecution. And then it was *full of glory*. Although it was unspeakable, something might be said of it, that it was “full of glory”; or, as it is in the original, “glorified joy.” It was a prelibation of the joy of heaven, that filled them with the light of God’s glory.

The doctrine I would raise from these words is this, *viz: True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.*

We see the apostle, in observing those exercises of religion in the Christians he wrote to, which discovered it to be true and excellent, singles out the affections of *love* and *joy*.

Here I would,

I. Show what is intended by the *affections*.

II. Observe some things which make it evident that a great part of true religion lies in them.

I. It may be enquired what are the affections? I answer, they are no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the will. [182]

God has endued the soul with two faculties. One is that by which it discerns, views, and judges of things, which is called the *understanding*. The other is that by which the soul is some way inclined with respect to the things it views—either is inclined *to them* or is disinclined *from them*. This faculty is variously named. Sometimes it is called the *inclination*, sometimes the *will*. The mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the *heart*.

The exercises of this faculty are of two sorts: either those by which the soul is carried out towards things in *approving* them, being pleased with and inclined to them; or those in which it opposes them, in *disapproving* them and in being displeased with and averse from them.

As the exercises of the will are various in their *kinds*, so they are in their *degrees*. There are some exercises wherein the soul is carried but a little beyond a state of perfect indifference. There are others wherein the approbation or dislike are stronger, wherein we may rise higher and higher, till the soul comes to act so vigorously that (through the laws of the union which the Creator had fixed between soul and body) the motion of the blood and animal spirits begins to be sensibly altered. And they are these more vigorous and sensible exercises of this faculty that are called the *affections*.

³Orig., ‘next’; restored to Edwards’s original.

The *will* and the *affections* are not two faculties, [183] the latter not being essentially distinct from the former. In every act of the will the soul either likes or dislikes, that liking, if it be in any high degree, is the same with *love*; and that disliking, if in any great degree the very same with *hatred*. In every act of the will *for* or *towards* something not present, the soul is in some degree inclined to that thing, and that inclination is the same with *desire*.

Such seems to be our nature that there never is any vigorous exercise of the will without some effect upon the body, in some alteration of the motion of its fluids, especially of the animal spirits. And on the other hand, the constitution of the body, and the motion of its fluids, may promote the exercise of the affections. But yet it is not the body, but the mind only, that is the proper seat of them.

The *affections* and *passions* are frequently spoken of as the same, and yet there is some difference. *Affection* is a word that, in its ordinary signification, is more extensive than *passion*, being used for all vigorous actings of the will; but *passion* for those that are more sudden, and whose effects on the animal spirits are more violent, and by which the mind is less in its own command.

[II.] The second thing proposed was to show that a great part of true religion lies in the affections. And here, [184]

1. What has been said of the nature of the affections, might put the matter out of doubt. For who can deny that true religion consists in a great measure in vigorous actings of the *will*, or the fervent exercises of the *heart*?

That religion which God requires does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes. He insists that we be in good earnest, “fervent in Spirit,” and that our hearts be vigorously engaged. If our wills and inclinations are not strongly exercised, we are nothing. The things of religion are so great that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of the heart unless they be lively and powerful. True religion is evermore a powerful thing; and the power of it appears, in the first place, in the inward exercises of it in the heart. Hence it is called the “power of godliness,” in distinction from the external appearances of it, that are “the form” (2 Tim. 3:5). The business of religion is from time to time compared to those exercises, wherein men are wont to have their hearts and strength greatly engaged, such as *running*, *wrestling*, *fighting*, and *warring*. And though true grace has various degrees, yet everyone that has the power of godliness has his heart so exercised towards divine things that these holy exercises prevail in him above all natural affections. For every true disciple of Christ “loves him above father and mother, wife and children, brethren and sisters, houses and lands; yea, his own life.”

2. The author of human nature has not only [185] given affections to men, but has made them the spring of their actions. As the affections not only belong to the human nature but are a great part of it, so holy affections do not only belong to true religion but are a very great part of it. And as true religion is of a practical nature, and the affections are the spring of men’s actions, it must consist very much in them. The affections we see are the springs that set men a going in all the affairs of life. Take away *these* and there would be no activity among mankind, or any earnest pursuit whatsoever. And as in worldly things, worldly affections are the spring of men’s actions; so in religious matters, the spring of their actions are religious affections. He that has knowledge only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion.

3. Nothing is more manifest in *fact* than that the things of religion take hold of men’s souls no further than they *affect* them. There are multitudes that often hear of the divine perfections, of the unspeakable love of God and Christ, of heaven and hell, and yet remain as they were before, with no sensible alteration either in heart or practice, because they are not *affected* with what they hear. Yea, there never was any considerable change wrought in the mind or conversation of any one that had not his affections moved. Never was there a natural man engaged earnestly to seek salvation, while the heart remained unaffected.

4. The holy scriptures place religion very [186] much in the affections—such as *fear*, *hope*, *love*, *hatred*, *desire*, *joy*, *sorrow*, *gratitude*, *compassion*, and *zeal*. They place so much in godly *fear* that it is often spoken of as the character of those that are truly religious, that “they tremble at God’s word,” “fear

before him,” “are afraid of his judgments,” and a compellation commonly given them in scripture is “fearers of God” or “they that fear the Lord.” And true godliness in general is very often called “the fear of God.” So *hope* in God and his promises is often spoken of as a considerable part of religion. It is mentioned as one of the three great things of which religion consists (1 Cor. 13:13). It is so great a part that the apostle says we are saved by hope (Rom. 8:24). Hope in the Lord is also frequently mentioned as the character of good men; and this and religious fear are, once and again, joined together as jointly descriptive of the godly man. In like manner, much is placed in *love*: love to God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the people of God, and to mankind. The contrary affection of hatred also, as having sin for its object, is spoken of as no inconsiderable part of religion. It is spoken of as that by which true religion may be distinguished: “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Prov. 8:13). And accordingly the saints are called upon to give evidence of their sincerity by this: “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil” (Psalm 97:10). So holy desire, exercised in hungerings and thirstings after God and [187] holiness, is mentioned as one of those great things which denotes a man truly blessed: “Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). So holy joy, as an important part of religion, is often pressed with great earnestness. And it is mentioned among the principal fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

Religious sorrow, mourning, and brokenness of heart are also frequently spoken of as a great part of religion. Again, the holy scriptures frequently speak of *compassion* or *mercy* as an essential thing, insomuch that a merciful man, and a good man, are equivalent terms in the Bible. Zeal is also spoken of as an essential part of religion. It is spoken of as a great thing Christ had in view in giving himself for our redemption: “Who gave himself for us, that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14). And this is spoken of as the great thing wanting in the lukewarm Laodiceans (Rev. 3:15–19).

They then who would deny that much of true religion lies in the affections must throw away the Bible, and get some other rule by which to judge of the nature of religion.

5. The scriptures represent religion as summarily comprehended in love, the chief of the affections.

So our blessed Savior, in answer to the lawyer who asked him which was the greatest commandment [188] of the law: “Jesus said unto him, Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mat. 22:37–40). Which last words signify that these two commandments comprehend all the duty prescribed and the religion taught in the law and the prophets. The apostle Paul from time to time makes the same representation. He speaks of love as the greatest thing in religion, without which the greatest knowledge and gifts are vain and worthless (1 Cor. 13).

Now, though it be true that the love thus spoken of includes the whole of a right temper towards God and man, yet it may be considered that this, when in vigorous exercise, is no other than affectionate love. And surely it is such love which Christ speaks of as the sum of all religion. Indeed it cannot be supposed, when this is spoken of as the sum of all religion, that hereby is meant the act, exclusive of the habit, or that the exercise of the understanding is excluded. But it is evident from scripture that the essence of all true religion lies in *holy love*; and that in this divine affection, and an habitual disposition to it, and those things which are the fruits of it, consists the whole of religion.

From hence it clearly appears that a great [189] part of religion consists in the affections, for love is the first and chief of them and the fountain of all the rest. From love arises hatred of those things which are contrary to what we love. And from the various exercises of love and hatred, according to the circumstances of their objects, arise all other affections.

6. He whom God sent into the world to be the light of the world, and the perfect example of true religion, even the Lord Jesus Christ, was a person of a remarkably tender and affectionate heart. And his virtue was expressed very much in the exercise of holy affections. He was the greatest instance of ardency and strength of love, to both God and man, that ever was. These affections got the victory in that mighty

conflict, when “he prayed more earnestly, and offered strong cries and tears,” and wrestled in tears and in blood. Such was the power of the exercises of his holy love that they were stronger than death and, in that great struggle, overcame the natural affections of fear and grief, when he was sore amazed and his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. And he also appeared to be full of affection in the whole course of his life. We read of his great *zeal*, of his *grief* for the sins of men, and of his *pity* and *compassion*. How ineffably affectionate was that last dying conversation which Jesus had with his eleven disciples the evening before he was crucified! Of all the [190] discourses ever uttered by man, this was the most affectionate and affecting.

7. The religion of heaven consists much in affection. There true religion is in its utmost purity and perfection. But according to the scripture representation, the religion of heaven consists chiefly in holy *love* and *joy*, and the expression of these in fervent and exalted praises.

8. It is an evidence that true religion lies much in the affections that the scriptures place the sin of the heart much in *hardness of heart*. It was hardness of heart that excited grief and displeasure in Christ towards the Jews (Mark 3:5). The reason given why the house of Israel would not obey God was that they were “hard-hearted” (Ezek. 3:7). And that great work of God in conversion is expressed once and again by God’s “taking away the heart of stone, and giving a heart of flesh.”

Now by a “hard heart” is plainly meant a heart not easy to be moved with virtuous affections. Like a stone, it is insensible and hard to be impressed. Hence the hard heart is called a “stony heart,” and is opposed to a “heart of flesh,” which is sensibly touched and moved. We read of a “hard heart” and a “tender heart.” And doubtless we are to understand these as contrary to each other. But what is a tender heart, but one that is easily impressed with what ought to affect it? [191]

Upon the whole I think it abundantly evident that true religion lies very much in the affections. Indeed, so much that without holy affections there is no true religion. And no light in the understanding is good which does not produce holy affection in the heart. No habit or principle is good which has no such exercise. And no external fruit is good which does not proceed from such exercises.

Having thus considered the evidence of the proposition laid down, I proceed to some inferences.

1. We may hence learn how great their error is who are for discarding all religious affections.

Because many that have appeared to have great religious affections have not manifested a right temper of mind, and have run into many errors, religious affections in general are grown out of credit, as though religion did not at all consist in them. Thus we run from one extreme to another. Some time back we were in the other extreme. There was a prevalent disposition to look upon all high religious affections as eminent exercises of high grace. If persons did but appear to be much moved, so as to be full of religious talk, it was too much the manner without further examination to conclude them full of the Spirit of God. But of late, instead of admiring, it is a thing much more prevalent to *reject* all religious affections, *without distinction*. Whereas, though to true religion there must be something besides affections, yet it consists so much in the affections [192] that there can be no true religion without them. He who has no religious affection is in a state of spiritual death, and is wholly destitute of the saving influences of the Spirit of God.

The manner of slighting all religious *affections* is the way exceedingly to harden the hearts of men, and to encourage them in their stupidity and senselessness. Prejudice against them has a tendency to stun the life and power of religion, preclude the effect of ordinances, and hold us down in a state of dulness. And for persons to despise and cry them all down is the way to shut all religion out of their own hearts. They who condemn high affections in others are not like to have them in themselves. And they who have but little religious affection have certainly but little religion. And they who condemn others for their religious affections, and have none themselves, have no religion.

There are false affections, and there are true. A man’s having *much affection* does not prove that he has religion. But his having *no affection* proves that he has not. The right way is not to reject all affections, nor to approve all, but to distinguish between them, approving some and rejecting others.

2. If true religion lies much in the *affections*, such means are to be desired as have a tendency to move the affections. Such books, and such a way of preaching the word, administering the ordinances, worshiping God in prayer, and singing [193] praises as have a tendency to affect the heart are much to be desired.

Indeed, there may be such means as may have a tendency to stir up the passions of ignorant persons, and yet no tendency to benefit their souls. For they may have a tendency to excite affections, but little or none to excite gracious affections. But undoubtedly, if the things of religion are exhibited truly, so as tends to convey just apprehensions of them, the more they have a tendency to move the affections the better.

3. If true religion lies much in the affections, what cause have we to be ashamed that we are no more affected with the great things of religion!

God has given to mankind affections for the same purpose which he has given all our faculties; viz., that they might be subservient to religion. And yet how common is it among mankind that their affections are much more exercised in other matters than in that! How insensible are most men about the great things of another world! How dull are their affections! How cold their love, languid their desires, and small their gratitude! How can they sit and hear of the infinite height and depth, length and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, and yet be cold, heavy, and insensible! Where are the exercises of our affections proper, if not here? What is it [194] that does more require them? Can any thing be set in our view greater and more important?

If we ought ever to exercise our affections at all, they ought to be exercised about those objects which are most worthy of them. But is there anything which men can find in heaven or earth so worthy to be the objects of their admiration and love, their earnest and longing desires, their hope and their rejoicing, and their fervent zeal, as those things that are held forth to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ? God has so disposed things, in his glorious dispensations, revealed to us in the gospel, as though every thing was contrived to have the greatest possible tendency to reach our hearts in the most tender part, and move our affections most sensibly. How great cause, therefore, have we to be humbled to the dust, that we are no more affected!

PART II.

Showing what are no certain signs that religious affections are truly gracious, or that they are not.

If anyone, on reading what has been said, is ready to acquit himself and say, "I am not one of those who have no religious affections, [195] I am often greatly moved with the consideration of the great things of religion," let him not conclude from this that he has religious affections. We have already observed that, as we ought not to condemn all affections, so we ought not to approve of all (as though everyone that was religiously affected had the saving influence of the Spirit of God) but to distinguish among religious affections between one sort and another. Now in order to this, I would: 1) observe some things which are no signs one way or other, either that affections are such as religion consists in, or that they are otherwise. 2) I would observe [in Part III] some things wherein those affections which are spiritual differ from those which are not.

First, I would take notice of some things which are no signs that affections are gracious or that they are not.

I. It is no sign, either one way or other, that religious affections are *raised very high*.

Some are ready to condemn all high affections. If persons appear to have their religious affections raised to an extraordinary pitch, they are prejudiced against them and determine that they are delusions, without any farther inquiry. But if true religion lies much in religious affections, then there will be great religious affections where there is a great deal of true religion.

Love is an affection, but will any Christian say men ought not to love God in a high degree? [196] And will any say that we ought not to have a great hatred of sin and a deep sorrow for it? Or that we should not have very strong desires after holiness? Who is there that will go and bless God that he is affected enough with what he has read and heard of the wonderful love of God to rebels in giving his only begotten Son to die for them, and of the dying love of Christ, and will pray that he may not be affected with them in any higher degree, because high affections are enthusiastical and ruinous to religion?

Our text speaks of high affections when it speaks of “rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Here the most superlative expressions are used that language will afford. And the scriptures often require us to exercise very high affections. Thus in the first and great commandment of the law there is an accumulation of expressions, as though words were wanting to express the degree, in which we ought to love God: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” We find the most eminent saints in scripture often professing high affections. Thus the psalmist again and again. The apostle Paul the same. He expresses the exercise of pity and concern for others, even to “anguish of heart,” and speaks of the exultation and triumphs of his soul. It is often foretold of the church, in her happy seasons on earth, that she shall exceedingly [197] rejoice. The angels in heaven are exceedingly affected with what they behold and contemplate. They are all as a pure flame of fire in their love, and in the greatness of their joy and gratitude. Their praises are represented ‘as the voice of many waters, and the voice of a great thunder’.

From these things it appears that religious affections being very high is no evidence that they have not the nature of true religion. Therefore they greatly err who condemn persons as enthusiasts merely because their affections are very high.

On the other hand, it is no evidence that religious affections are of a spiritual nature because they are great. Great multitudes who were affected with the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead were elevated to a high degree when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and cried, with loud voices, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” But how quickly was this at an end? When this Jesus stands bound, it is not then “Hosanna,” but “Crucify, crucify.”

II. It is no sign that affections have the nature of true religion, or that they have not, when they have *great effects on the body*.

Such are the laws of union of soul and body that the mind can have no vigorous exercise without some effect upon the body. Yea, it is questionable whether an embodied soul ever so [198] much as thinks one thought, or has any exercise at all, but there is some corresponding motion in some part of the body. Universal experience shows that the exercise of the affections has in a special manner an effect on the body. And it is not to be wondered at that very *great* exercises of the affections should have *great* effects on the body, and that as there are very great affections, both common and spiritual, great effects on the body should arise from both these kinds of affections. However, great effects on the body are no sure evidences that affections are spiritual. For we see that such effects often arise from great affections about temporal things. And if great affections about secular things may have these effects, I know not why we should determine that high affections about religious things cannot have the like effect.

Nor, on the other hand, do I know of any reason to determine that gracious and holy affections, when raised as high as any natural affections, cannot have a great effect on the body. I know of no reason why being affected with a view of God’s glory should not cause the body to faint, as well as being affected with a view of Solomon’s glory. There is a great power in spiritual affections. We read of the power which worketh in Christians, and of the effectual working of God’s power in them. The text we are upon speaks of “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” And who that considers what man’s nature is, and

[199] what the nature of the affections is, can reasonably doubt but that such unutterable joys may be too mighty for weak dust and ashes?

The psalmist, speaking of the vehement religious affections he had, speaks of an effect on his flesh or body, besides what was on his soul, expressly distinguishing one from the other: “My *soul* thirsteth for thee, my *flesh* longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is” (Ps. 73:1).

The prophet Habakkuk speaks of his body’s being overborne by a sense of the majesty of God: “When I heard, my belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice, rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself” (Hab. 3:16).

That such ideas of God’s glory as are sometimes given in this world have a tendency to overbear the body is evident, because the scripture gives us an account that this has actually been the effect of those external manifestations God has made to some for that end, to give them an idea of his majesty and glory. Such instances we have in the prophet Daniel and the apostle John. Daniel, giving an account of an external representation of the glory of Christ, says: “And there remained no strength in me, for my comeliness was turned into corruption, and I retained no strength” (Dan. 10: 8). And the apostle John, giving an account of a like manifestation made to him, says: “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead” (Rev. 1:17). It is in vain to say here these were [200] only external manifestations of the glory of Christ. For though it be true, yet the end of them was to give an idea of the thing represented, the divine glory and majesty of Christ; and thus undoubtedly they improved them, and were affected by them. According to the end for which God intended these outward signs, they received by them a great and lively apprehension of the real glory and majesty of God’s nature, which they were signs of, and thus were greatly affected, their souls being swallowed up and then bodies overborne. And I think they are very bold and daring who will say God cannot, or will not, give the like clear and affecting apprehensions of the same glory and majesty of his nature to any of his saints, without the intervention of such external shadows of it.

Before I leave this head, I would further observe that the scripture often makes use of bodily effects to express the strength of holy and spiritual affections—such as *trembling* (Ps. 119:120), *groaning* (Rom. 8:26), *being sick* (Cant. 2:5), *crying out* (Ps. 84:2), *panting* (Ps. 38:10), and *fainting* (Ps. 84:2). Now if it be supposed that these are only figurative expressions, to represent the degree of affections, yet I hope all will allow that they are suitable figures. Which how could they be, if those spiritual affections they are designed to represent have no tendency to any [201] such thing? I cannot think God would commonly make use of things which are very alien from spiritual affections, and are shrewd marks of the hand of Satan, as figures to represent the high degree of holy and heavenly affections.

III. It is no sign that affections are truly gracious, or that they are not, that they cause those who have them to be *fluent*, *fervent*, and *abundant in talking* of the things of religion.

There are many who, if they see this in others, are greatly prejudiced against them. Their being so full of talk is, with them, a sufficient ground to condemn them as Pharisees or hypocrites. On the other hand, there are many who, if they see this effect in any, are forward to determine that they are under the influences of God’s Spirit. More especially are they persuaded of this if they are not only abundant, but very affectionate and earnest in their talk.

But this is the fruit of little judgment, as events abundantly show.

That persons are disposed to be abundant in talking of religion may be from a *good* cause, and it may be from a *bad* one. It may be because their hearts are full of holy affections, for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”; and it may be because they are full of that affection that is not holy. It is the nature of affections, of whatever kind, if they are strong, to dispose persons to be much in speaking of that which they are affected with, and to speak earnestly. [202] And therefore persons talking abundantly and fervently about religious things can be an evidence of no more than this, that they are much affected with them, which may be and yet there be no great grace.

A person may be full of talk of his own experience, falling upon it in all companies, and when it is so it is rather a dark sign than a good one, as a tree that is overfull of leaves seldom bears much fruit.

IV. It is no sign that affections are gracious, or that they are otherwise, that persons *did not make them* themselves, or *excite them of their own contrivance* and by their own strength.

There are many that condemn all affections which are excited in a way that the subjects of them can give no account of, as not seeming to be the natural consequence of the principles of human nature in such circumstances, but to be from the influence of some extrinsic power upon their minds. How greatly has the doctrine of sensibly perceiving the immediate power of the Spirit of God been ridiculed! Many say the manner of the Spirit of God is to cooperate in a silent, secret, and indiscernible way, with the use of means and our own endeavors—so that there is no distinguishing between the influences of the Spirit of God and the natural operations of our own minds.

And it is true that for any to expect the influences of the Spirit without a diligent improvement [203] of the appointed means is presumption, and to expect that he will operate upon their minds without means subservient to the effect is enthusiastical. It is also undoubtedly true that the Spirit of God is very various in the manner and circumstances of his operations, and that sometimes he operates in a way more secret, and gradual, than at others.

But if there be indeed a power, different from the power of all means and instruments, and above the power of nature, which is requisite in order to the production of saving grace in the heart; then it is not unreasonable to suppose that this should frequently be produced after such a manner as to make it manifest that it is so. If grace be indeed owing to an intrinsic agent, why is it unreasonable to suppose it should seem to be so to them who are the subjects of it? Is it a strange thing that it should seem to be as it is? When grace is the workmanship of the Almighty, is it strange that it should seem to them who are subjects of it agreeable to truth? And if persons tell of effects in their own minds that seem to them not to be from the natural operation of their minds, but from the supernatural power of some other agent, should it at once be looked upon as a sure evidence of delusion, because things seem to them to be as they are? Yet this is the objection which is made. It is looked upon as a clear evidence that the affections many persons have are not from such a cause, because they seem to [204] them to be from that cause. They declare that what they are conscious of seems to them to be not from themselves but from the mighty power of God, and others from hence determine what they experience is not from God but from themselves or from the devil.

If grace in the soul is so the effect of God's power that it is fitly compared to those effects which are farthest from being owing to any strength in the subject—such as a *generation*, or a *being begotten*; and a *resurrection*, or a *being raised from the dead*; and a *creation*, or a *being brought out of nothing into being*—then why should the Almighty, in so great a work of his power, so carefully hide his power that the subjects of it should be able to discern nothing of it? Or what reason have any to determine that he does so? It is frequently God's manner to make his hand visible, that he alone might be exalted, and that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of man. So it was, among other works, in that great one, his converting the heathen world, after all the endeavors of philosophers had proved in vain for many ages, and it was become abundantly evident that the world was utterly helpless by anything but the mighty power of God. And so it was in most of the conversions of particular persons we have an account of in the New Testament. They were not wrought on in a silent, secret, gradual, and insensible manner, but with those manifest [205] evidences of a supernatural power, wonderfully and suddenly causing a great change, which in these days are looked upon as certain signs of delusion.

The apostle, in Eph. 1:18–19, speaks of God's enlightening the minds of Christians, and so bringing them to believe in Christ that they *might know* the exceeding greatness of his power to them who believe. He can mean nothing else than *that they might know by experience*. But if Christians know this power by experience, then they feel it, and discern it as sensibly distinguishable from the natural operations of their own minds; which is not agreeable to the notion of God's operating always so secretly and indiscernibly that it cannot be known to be the influence of any extrinsic power, any otherwise than as they may argue it from scripture.

So that it is unreasonable and unscriptural to determine that affections are not from God's Spirit because they are not sensibly from the persons themselves that are the subjects of them.

On the other hand, it is no evidence that affections are gracious that they are not purposely produced by those who are the subjects of them, or that they arise in their minds in a manner they cannot account for.

There are some who make this an argument in their own favor. They say: "I am sure I did not make it myself. It was no contrivance of [206] mine. It came when I thought nothing of it. If I might have the world for it, I cannot make it again when I please." And hence they determine that what they have experienced must be from the influence of the Spirit of God. But this does not follow. There are other spirits who have influence on the minds of men, besides the Holy Ghost. There are many false spirits, who with great subtlety and power mimic the operations of the Spirit of God. And there are many of Satan's operations which are distinguishable from the voluntary exercises of men's own minds. They are so in those dreadful and horrid suggestions, with which he follows many persons. And the power of Satan may be as immediate in false comforts and joys, and often is so in fact.

And where neither a good nor evil spirit has any immediate hand, persons of a weak and vapory habit of body may have strong apprehensions and strong affections unaccountably arising, which are not voluntarily produced by themselves.

V. It is no sign that *religious affections are truly spiritual, or they are not, that they come with texts of scripture, remarkably brought to the mind.*

It is no sign that affections are not gracious, that they are occasioned by scriptures so coming to the mind.

On the other hand, neither is it any sign that [207] affections are gracious that they arise on occasion of scriptures brought suddenly and wonderfully to the mind. Some seem to look upon this as a good evidence, and will say: "There were such and such sweet promises brought to my mind. They came suddenly as if they were spoken to me. I had no hand in it. I was not thinking of it. I did not know at first that it was scripture." And it may be they will add, "One scripture came flowing in after another, and so texts all over the Bible, the most sweet and pleasant, the most apt and suitable which could be devised." Thus they think they have undoubted evidence that their state is good. But where is there any such rule to be found in the Bible?

What evidence is there that the devil cannot bring texts to the mind, and misapply them, to deceive persons? If he has power to bring any words at all to persons' minds, he may have power to bring words contained in the Bible. If he was permitted to put Christ himself in mind of texts of scripture to tempt him, what reason have we to determine that he may not do the same to men? And if he may abuse one text of scripture, so he may another. And if he can bring one comfortable text to the mind, so he may a thousand; and may choose out such as tend most to serve his purpose, and may heap up scripture promises, tending according to the perverse application he makes of them, wonderfully to remove the [208] rising doubts and to confirm the false joy and confidence of a poor deluded sinner.

VI. It is no evidence that religious affection is saving, or that they are otherwise, that there is *an appearance of love* in them.

No Christians pretend that this is an argument against the saving nature of religious affections. But on the other hand, there are some who suppose it is a good evidence that affections are from the saving influences of the Holy Ghost. Their argument is that *Satan cannot love*, this affection being directly contrary to his nature. And it is true, nothing is more excellent than a Spirit of Christian love; it is that by which we are most conformed to heaven and most contrary to hell and the devil. But yet it is ill arguing from hence that there are no counterfeits of it. And the subtlety of Satan, and men's deceitful hearts, are wont chiefly to be exercised in counterfeiting those virtues and graces that are in highest repute. And there are none, it may be, that have more counterfeits than love and humility.

VII. *Persons having religious affections of many kinds, accompanying one another*, is not sufficient to determine whether they are real believers or no.

Though false religion is wont to be maimed and monstrous, and not to have that entireness and symmetry of parts which is to be seen in true religion, yet there may be a great variety [209] of false affections together that may resemble gracious ones.

There are slight touches of all kinds of gracious affections— as of *love to God and love to the brethren*, so of *godly sorrow for sin*, as in the children of Israel in the wilderness; so of spiritual joy, as in the stony ground hearers. So unbelievers may have earnest religious *desires*, like Balaam's, which he expresses under an extraordinary view that he had of the estate of God's people, as distinguished from all the rest of the world. (Num. 23:9–10).

And as men, while in a state of nature, are capable of a resemblance of all kinds of religious affections, so nothing hinders but that they may have many of them together.

VIII. Nothing can certainly be determined concerning the nature of the affections by this, that *comforts* and *joys* follow *awakenings* and *convictions* of conscience.

Many persons seem to be prejudiced against affections and experiences that come in such a method, as has been much insisted on by many divines: first such awakenings, fears, and awful apprehensions; followed with such humblings, in a sense of total sinfulness and helplessness; and then such light and comfort. They look upon all such schemes, laying down such methods and steps, to be of men's devising. And particularly if high affections of joy follow great distress and terror, it is made by many an argument against [210] those affections. But such prejudices and objections are without reason or scripture. Surely it cannot be unreasonable to suppose that before God delivers persons from a state of sin, and exposedness to eternal destruction, he should give them some sense of the evil he delivers them from; and that they should be first sensible of their absolute necessity, and afterwards of Christ's sufficiency and God's mercy through him.

And that it is God's manner of dealing with men "to lead them into a wilderness, before he speaks comfortably to them"; and so to order it that they be brought into distress and made to see their own helplessness and absolute dependence on his grace, before he works any great deliverance for them; is abundantly manifest by the scripture. Backsliding Israel, before God heals them, are brought to "acknowledge, that they have sinned, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord," and to see that "they lie down in their shame, and that confusion covers them," and "that in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and from the multitude of mountains," and that God only can save them (Jer. 3:23–25).

But there are many things in scripture which directly show that this is God's ordinary manner in working salvation for the souls of men, and in the manifestations he makes of himself and of his mercy in Christ in the ordinary works of his grace on the hearts of sinners. An old inveterate wound must be searched to the bottom, in [211] order to healing; and the scripture compares sin, the wound of the soul, to this and speaks of healing this wound without searching it as vain and deceitful (Jer. 8:11). When John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Christ, and prepare men's hearts for his reception, he did it by showing them their sins and by bringing the self-righteous Jews off from their own righteousness, telling them that they were a "generation of vipers" and showing them their danger of "the wrath to come."

And if it be indeed God's manner (as the foregoing considerations show), before he gives men the comfort of a deliverance from their sin and misery, to give them a considerable sense of the greatness and dreadfulness of those evils, and their extreme wretchedness by reason of them, surely it is not unreasonable to suppose that persons, at least often, while under these views, should have great distress of mind—especially if it be considered what these evils are that they have a view of, which are no other than great and manifold sins against the infinite majesty of the great Jehovah, and the suffering of the fierceness of his wrath to all eternity. And we have many plain instances in scripture of persons that have been actually brought into extreme distress by such convictions, before they have received saving consolations. As the multitude at Jerusalem, who were "pricked in their heart, and said unto [212] Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" And the apostle Paul, who "trembled and was astonished," before he was comforted. And the jailor, when "he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'"

From these things, it appears unreasonable to make this an objection against the truth and spiritual nature of the comfortable and joyful affections which any have, that they follow awful apprehensions and distresses. And on the other hand, it is no evidence that comforts and joys are right because they succeed great terrors and fears of hell. This seems to be what some persons lay great weight upon: esteeming great terrors an evidence of a great work wrought on the heart, well preparing the way for solid comfort; not considering that terror, and a conviction of conscience, are different things. For though convictions of conscience do often cause terror, yet they do not consist in it, and terrors do often arise from other causes. Convictions of conscience, through the influences of God's Spirit, consist in conviction of sinfulness of heart and practice, and of the dreadfulfulness of sin, as committed against a God of terrible majesty, infinite holiness, and hatred of sin, and strict justice in punishing of it. But there are some persons that have frightful apprehensions of hell, a [213] dreadful pit ready to swallow them up, and flames just ready to lay hold of them, who at the same time seem to have very little enlightenings of conscience, really convincing them of their sinfulness of heart and life.

Nay, some speak of a great sight they have of their wickedness, who really, when the matter comes to be well examined, are found to have little or no convictions of conscience. They tell of a dreadful hard heart, when they have none of those things in their thoughts wherein the hardness of men's hearts consist[s]. They tell of a dreadful load and sink of sin within them, when if the matter is carefully enquired into, they have not in view any thing wherein the corruption of nature does truly consist, nor any thought of any particular thing wherein their hearts are sinfully defective.

And if persons have had great terrors, which really have been from the convincing influences of the Spirit, it does not thence follow that their terrors must needs end in true comfort. The unmortified corruption of the heart may quench the Spirit of God (after he has been striving) by leading men to presumptuous and self-exalting hopes and joys, as well as otherwise.

And as seeming distinctness (as to steps and method) is no certain sign that a person is *converted*, so the being without it is no evidence that a person is *not converted*! For though it might be made evident on scripture principles that [214] a sinner cannot heartily receive Christ as his Savior, who is not convinced of his sin and misery, and of his own emptiness and helplessness, and his just desert of eternal condemnation, and that therefore such convictions must be someway *implied* in what is wrought in his soul; yet it is not necessary that all those things which are implied in an act of faith in Christ must be distinctly wrought in the soul in so many successive works of the Spirit that shall be, each one, plain and manifest in all who are truly converted. On the contrary, sometimes the change made at first is like a confused chaos, so that we know not what to make of it. The manner of the Spirit's proceeding in them that are born of the Spirit is very often exceeding mysterious. We, as it were, hear the sound of it, the effect of it is discernible, but no man can tell whence it came or whither it went. It is oftentimes as difficult to know the way of the Spirit in the new birth as in the first birth: "As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, or how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child. Even so thou knowest not the work of God, that worketh all" (Eccl. 11:5).

What we have principally to do with, in our inquiries into our own state, or in the directions we give to others, is the *nature* of the effect that God has brought to pass in the soul. As to the steps which the Spirit of God took to bring that effect to pass, we may leave them to him. We are often in scripture expressly directed to try [215] ourselves by the *nature* of the fruits of the Spirit, but no where by the Spirit's *method* of producing them. Many greatly err in their notions of a clear work of conversion, calling that a clear work where the successive steps of influence and method of experience is clear. Whereas that indeed is the clearest work (not where the order of *doing* is clearest, but) where the spiritual and divine nature of the work *done*, and effect *wrought*, is most clear.

IX. It is no certain sign that religious affections have the nature of true religion, or have not, that they dispose persons to *spend much time in religion, and to be zealously engaged in the external duties of worship*.

This has very unreasonably been looked upon as an argument against the religious affections which some have had, that they spend so much time in reading, praying, singing, hearing sermons, and the like. It is plain from scripture that the tendency of true grace is to cause persons much to delight in such exercises. Grace had this effect upon the primitive Christians in Jerusalem: “And they continuing daily, with one accord, in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness, and singleness of heart, praising God” (Acts 2:46–47). It made Daniel and David delight in prayer, and solemnly attend it three times a day. It makes the saints delight in singing praises to God: “Praise ye the Lord, for it is good to [216] sing praises unto our God, for it is pleasant, and praise is comely” (Ps. 147:1). It makes them delight to hear the word of God, and leads them to love public worship.

This is the nature of true grace. But yet on the other hand, persons being disposed to abound, and to be zealously engaged in the external exercises of religion, and to spend much time in them, is no sure evidence of grace. So it was with the Pharisees, who “made long prayers, and fasted twice a week.” And Ezekiel’s hearers delighted in hearing him, and “with their mouth showed much love, while they did not the things he said, and their hearts went after their covetousness” (Ezek. 33).

Experience shows that persons, from false religion, may be inclined to be abundant in the external exercises of religion—yea, to give themselves up to them, and devote almost their whole time to them.

X. Nothing can be certainly known of the nature of religious affections by this, that they *much dispose persons with their mouths to praise and glorify God.*

This is implied in what has been just now observed. But because many look upon it as a bright evidence of gracious affection when persons appear greatly disposed to praise God and affectionately to call on others to do it, I thought it deserved a more particular consideration.

No Christian will make it an argument against [217] a person that he seems to have such a disposition. Nor can it reasonably be looked upon as an evidence, if those things that have been already observed be considered. But it will appear more evidently that this is no certain sign of grace, if we consider what instances the scripture gives us of it. We often have an account of this in the multitude that were present when Christ preached and wrought miracles: they “glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw it on this fashion’” (Mark 2:12). The children of Israel at the Red Sea “sang God’s praise, but soon forgot his works” [Ps. 106:12–13]. And the Jews, in Ezekiel’s time, “with their mouth showed much love, while their heart went after their covetousness.”

XI. It is no sign that affections are right, or that they are wrong, that the persons that have them, *are exceeding confident that what they experience is divine, and that they are in a good estate.*

It is an argument with some against persons that they are deluded, if they pretend to be assured of their good estate and to be carried beyond all doubting of the favor of God, supposing that there is no such thing to be expected in the church of God as a full assurance of hope (unless it be in some very extraordinary circumstances, as in the case of martyrdom), contrary to the plainest scripture evidence. It is manifest that it was a common thing for the saints that we have a particular account of in scripture to be [218] assured. God, in the plainest manner, revealed and testified his special favor to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Daniel, and others. Job often speaks with the greatest assurance. David, throughout the book of Psalms, almost everywhere speaks in the most positive manner of God as his God. Hezekiah appeals to God as one that knew “he had walked before him in truth and with a perfect heart” (2 Kings 20:3). The apostle Paul, through all his epistles, speaks in an assured strain, ever speaking positively of his special relation to Christ and his interest in, and expectation of, the future reward.

The nature of the covenant of grace and God’s declared ends in that covenant, plainly show it to be God’s design, to make ample provision for having an assured hope of eternal life, while upon earth. The promises are full, often repeated, and various ways exhibited; and there are many witnesses and many seals; and God has confirmed his promises with an oath. And his declared design in all this is, that the heirs of the promises might have an undoubted hope, and full assurance of their future glory.

Moreover, all Christians are directed to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure, and are told how they may do it (2 Pet. 1: 5–8). And it is spoken of as a thing very unbecoming [for] Christians not to know whether Christ be in them or no (2 Cor. 13:5). To add no more, it is manifest that Christians knowing their interests in the saving benefits of Christianity is a [219] thing ordinarily attainable, because the apostles tell us by what means common Christians (and not only apostles and martyrs) were wont to know this. See 1 Cor. 2:12 and 1 John 2:3–5, 3:14–24, 4:13, 5:2 and 5:19.

Therefore it must needs be very unreasonable to determine that persons are hypocrites because they seem to be out of doubt of their salvation.

On the other hand, it is no sufficient reason to determine that men are saints because they have an exceeding confidence that their state is good. Nothing can certainly be argued from their confidence, how great and strong so ever it be. If we see a man that commonly speaks in the most bold language in prayer; with whom it is common to use the most confident expressions, such as, “I know certainly that God is my Father. I know I shall go to heaven as well as if I was there”; and that seems to have done forever with any examination into his state, as a thing sufficiently known, and to condemn all that so much as intimate there is some reason to doubt whether all is right; such things are no signs at all that it is indeed so. Such an overbearing and violent sort of confidence as this has not the countenance of a true Christian assurance. It savors more of the spirit of the Pharisees, who never doubted but that they were saints. If they had more of the spirit of the publican with their confidence, it would have [220] more of the aspect of one that has no confidence in himself.

There are two sorts of self-deceivers: one that are deceived with their outward morality and external religion; the other are those who are deceived with discoveries and elevations, who often cry down works and men’s own righteousness, and talk much of free grace, but at the same time make a righteousness of their discoveries, and of their humiliation, and exalt themselves to heaven with them. Of these two, the latter are the worst. For they are commonly by far the most confident, and with the most difficulty brought off from it. I have scarcely known the instance of such a one in my life, that has been undeceived. The chief grounds of the confidence of many of them are impulses and supposed revelations, sometimes with texts of scripture and sometimes without. These impulses they have called the witness of the Spirit. And it is found by abundant experience that those who are led away by impulses and imagined revelations are extremely confident, for they suppose that the great Jehovah has declared these things to them, and that having his immediate testimony, a strong confidence is the highest virtue. Hence they are bold to say, “I know this or that. I know certainly. I am as sure as that I have a being.” And they despise all argument and inquiry in the case. And above all things else, it is easy to be accounted for that impressions and [221] impulses about that which is so pleasing, so suiting their self-love and pride, as their being the dear children of God, should make them strongly confident, especially when they have with their impulses and revelations high affections, which they take to be the most eminent exercises of grace.

The confidence of many of this sort of men is like the confidence of some mad men who think they are kings. They will maintain it against all manner of reason and evidence. And in one sense, it is much more immovable than a truly gracious assurance, which is not upheld but by the soul’s being kept in a holy frame and grace maintained in a lively exercise. If the Christian falls into a lifeless frame, and grace decays, he loses his assurance. But this confidence will not be shaken by sin. And some maintain their boldness in their hope in the most wicked ways, which is a sure evidence of their delusions.

*⁴Here I cannot but observe that there are certain doctrines often preached which need to be delivered with more caution and explanation than they frequently are. For as they are by many understood, they tend greatly to establish this false confidence. The doctrines I speak of are those of

⁴Wesley placed an asterisk (*) besides paragraphs he thought particularly important throughout the Pine edition of the *Works*.

*Christians living by faith not by sight, their giving glory to God by trusting him in the dark, living upon Christ and not upon experiences, not making their good frames the foundation of their faith; which are excellent doctrines when rightly understood, but corrupt and [222] destructive as many understand them. The scripture speaks of living or walking by faith and not by sight in no other way than these—viz., a being governed by a respect to eternal things, that are the objects of faith and are not seen, and not by a respect to temporal things, which are seen; a believing things revealed that we never saw with bodily eyes; and also living by faith in the promise of future things, without yet seeing or enjoying the things promised. This will be evident to anyone that looks over the scriptures which speak of faith in opposition to sight, as 2 Cor. 4:18 and 5:7; Heb. 11:1, 8, 13, 17, 27, 29; Rom. 8:24; John 20:29. But this doctrine, as it is understood by many, is that Christians ought firmly to believe and trust in God without spiritual sight or light, and although they are in a dark dead frame, and for the present have no spiritual discoveries. It is truly the duty of those who are thus in darkness to come out of darkness into light and believe. But that they should confidently believe, while they remain without spiritual light or sight, is an anti-scriptural and absurd doctrine. The scripture is ignorant of any faith in Christ, of the operation of God, that is not founded in a spiritual sight of Christ. True faith in Christ is never exercised any further than persons “behold as in a glass, the glory of the Lord,” and have “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus [223] Christ” (2 Cor. 3:18 and 4:6). That faith which is without spiritual light is not the faith of the children of light, but the presumption of the children of darkness. And therefore to press persons to believe, without any spiritual light or sight, greatly helps forward the delusions of the prince of darkness. Men not only cannot exercise faith without spiritual light, but they can exercise faith only just in such proportion as they have spiritual light. Men will trust in God no further than they know him, and they cannot be in the exercise of faith in him one ace further than they have a sight of his fullness and faithfulness *in exercise*. Nor can they have the exercise of trust in God any further than they are in a *gracious frame*. They that are in a dead carnal frame doubtless ought to trust in God, because that would be the same thing as coming out of their bad frame and turning to God. But to exhort men confidently to trust in God, and so hold up their hope and peace, though they are not in a gracious frame and continue not to be in it, is the same thing in effect as to exhort them confidently to trust in God, but not with a gracious trust. And what is that but a wicked presumption?*

*It is true, it is the duty of God’s people to trust in him when in darkness. In this sense they ought to trust in God when the aspects of his providence are dark and look as though God had forsaken them, and when many clouds gather and many enemies surround them with a [224] formidable appearance, and when all circumstances seem to render the promises of God difficult to be fulfilled. And God must be trusted out of sight, when we cannot see which way it is possible for him to fulfill his word, as everything but God’s mere word makes it look unlikely—so that if persons believe, they must hope against hope. Thus the ancient patriarchs, thus Job, David, Jeremiah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and the apostle Paul, gave glory to God, by trusting in him in darkness. But how different a thing is this from trusting in God without spiritual sight, and being at the same time in a dead and carnal frame!

*There is also such a thing as spiritual light being let into the soul in one way, when it is not in another. And so there is such a thing as believers trusting in God, and also knowing their good estate, when they are destitute of some kinds of experience. As for instance, they may have clear views of God’s sufficiency and faithfulness, and so confidently trust in him, and know that they are his children, and at the same time not have those clear ideas of his love as at other times. For it was thus with Christ himself in his last passion. But how different things are these from confidently trusting in God without spiritual light or experience?

*Those that thus insist on persons living by faith, when they have no experience and are in very bad frames, are also very absurd in their notions [225] of faith. What they mean by “faith” is believing that they are in a good estate. Hence they count it a dreadful sin for them to doubt of their estate, whatever frames they are in, and whatever things they do, because it is the great and heinous sin of unbelief. And he is the best man, and puts most honor upon God, that maintains his hope of his good estate the most

confidently when he has the least light or experience—that is to say, when he is in the worst frame; because, forsooth, that is a sign that he is strong in faith, giving glory to God, and against hope believes in hope. But what Bible do they learn this notion of faith out of, that it is a man’s confidently believing that he is in a good estate? If this be faith, the Pharisees had faith in an eminent degree. The scripture represents faith as that by which men are *brought into* a good estate, and therefore it cannot be the same thing as believing that they *are already* in one. To suppose that faith consists in persons’ believing that they are in a good estate is, in effect, the same thing as to suppose that faith consists in a person’s believing that he has faith, or in believing that he believes.

*Men are doubtless to blame for being in a dead carnal frame. But when they are in such a frame, when they have no sensible experience of the exercises of grace, but on the contrary are under the prevalency of their lusts and an unchristian spirit, they are not to blame for doubting [226] of their state. It is as impossible in the nature of things that a holy and Christian hope should be kept alive, in its clearness and strength, in such circumstances, as it is to maintain the bright sunshine in the air when the sun is gone down. Distant experiences, when darkened by present prevailing corruption, will never keep alive a gracious confidence, for it sickens and decays upon it. Nor is it at all to be lamented that persons doubt of their state in such circumstances; but on the contrary, it is desirable, and every way best that they should. It is agreeable to that wise and merciful constitution of things, which God has established, that it should be so. For so hath God constituted things in his dispensations towards his people that when their *love* decays, and the exercises of it fail or become weak, *fear* should arise. For then they need it to restrain them from sin, and to excite them to care for their souls, and to watchfulness and diligence in religion. But God hath so ordered that when *love* rises and is vigorous, then *fear* should vanish. For then they need it not, being actuated by a more excellent principle. There are no other principles which human nature is under the influence of that will ever make men conscientious but one of these two: *fear* or *love*. And therefore if one of these should not prevail as the other decayed, when love is asleep we should be exposed indeed. And therefore God has wisely ordained that these two opposite principles [227] should rise and fall, like the two opposite scales of a balance. Love is the *spirit of adoption*, or the childlike principle; if that slumbers, men fall under fear, which is the *spirit of bondage* or the servile principle. And so on the contrary. And if love, or the spirit of adoption, be carried to a great height, it drives away all fear. Agreeable to that of the Apostle: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). The two opposite principles of sin and holy love bring hope and fear into the hearts of God’s children in proportion as they prevail; that is, without something accidental intervening, as melancholy, ignorance, prejudices of education, wrong instruction, false principles, or peculiar temptations.

*Fear is cast out by the Spirit of God no other way than by the prevailing of love. Nor is peace ever maintained by his Spirit when love is asleep. At such a time, in vain are all our self-examinations, and poring on past experiences, in order to get assurance. For it is contrary to the nature of things, as God hath constituted them, that we should have assurance at such a time.

*They therefore directly thwart God’s wise constitution of things, who exhort others to be confident in their hope when in dead frames, under a notion of *living by faith* and *not by sight*, and *trusting in God in the dark*, and *living upon Christ and not upon experiences*; and warn them not [228] to doubt of their good estate, lest they should be guilty of the dreadful sin of unbelief. And it has a direct tendency to prevent their ever calling their state in question, how much soever wickedness reigns in their hearts or lives, under a notion of honoring God by “hoping against hope” and confidently trusting in God.

But to return from this digression, I would mention one thing more under this general head.

XII. Nothing can be certainly concluded concerning the nature of religious affections from this, that *the outward manifestations of them, and the relation persons give of them, are very affecting and such as greatly win the heart.*

Even true saints have not such a spirit of discerning that they can certainly determine who are godly and who are not. For though they know experimentally what true religion is, in the internal exercises of it; yet these are what they can neither feel nor see, in the heart of another. There is nothing in

others that comes within their view but outward appearance. But the scripture plainly intimates that judging by outward appearances is at best uncertain.

Before I finish this head, I would speak something to a strange notion some have given into of certainly knowing the good estate that others are in, as though it was immediately revealed to [229] them from heaven, by their love flowing out to them in an extraordinary manner. They argue thus: that their love being very sensible, may be certainly known by them who feel it, to be a true Christian love; and if it be a true Christian love, the Spirit of God must be the author of it; and inasmuch as the Spirit of God knows certainly whether others are the children of God or no, it must needs be that this infallible Spirit who deceives none, knows that person is a child of God. But such persons might be convinced of the falseness of their reasoning if they would consider whether it be not their duty to love those as the children of God who they think are so, and whom they have no reason to think otherwise, though God who searches the hearts knows them not to be his children? If it be their duty, then it is good, and the want of it is sin; and therefore the Spirit of God may be the author of it. The Spirit of God, without being a spirit of falsehood, may in such a case assist a person to do his duty, and keep him from sin. [230]

PART III

Showing what are distinguishing signs of truly gracious and holy affections.

I come now to the second thing appertaining to the *trial* of religious affections—viz., to take notice of some things wherein those affections that are spiritual and gracious differ from those that are not so.

I. Affections truly spiritual and gracious arise from those influences and operations on the heart which are *spiritual, divine, and supernatural*.

We find that those who are sanctified by the Spirit of God are in the New Testament called “spiritual” persons; and their being “spiritual” is spoken of as their peculiar character, and that wherein they are distinguished from those who are not sanctified.

Christians are called spiritual persons because they are born of the Spirit, and because of the indwelling and holy influences of the Spirit of God in them. And things are called spiritual as related to the Spirit of God.

But although it is with relation to the Spirit of God and his influences that persons and [231] things are called spiritual, yet not all those persons who are subject to any kind of influence of the Spirit of God are called spiritual in the New Testament.

Natural men may be the subjects of many influences of the Spirit of God, yet they are not, in the sense of the scripture, “spiritual” persons. Neither are any of those effects, gifts, qualities, or affections that are from the influence of the Spirit of God upon them called “spiritual” things. The great difference lies in these two things.

1. The Spirit of God is given to true believers to dwell in them, and to influence their hearts, as a divine supernatural spring of life and action. The scripture represents the Holy Spirit not only as moving and occasionally influencing the saints, but as dwelling in them as his temple, his proper abode and dwelling place (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; John 14:16–17). And he is represented as being so united to the faculties of the soul that he becomes a principle of new nature.

And the Spirit of God being thus communicated and united to them, they are from thence properly denominated “spiritual.”

On the other hand, though the Spirit of God may many ways influence natural men, yet because it is not thus communicated to them, they do not derive any denomination from it, so as to be styled “spiritual.” [232]

2. Another reason why the saints and their virtues are called spiritual is that the Spirit of God, dwelling as a vital principle in their souls, there produces those effects wherein he communicates himself in his own *proper nature*. Holiness is the nature of the Spirit of God, therefore he is called in scripture the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God so dwells in the hearts of the saints that he there, as a spring of life, communicates himself, in this his sweet and divine nature, making the soul a partaker of God's beauty and Christ's joy, so that the saint has truly fellowship *with* the Father, and *with* his Son Jesus Christ, in thus having the participation *of* the Holy Ghost.

Now these influences of the Spirit of God being thus peculiar to God, and being those wherein God does, in so high a manner, communicate himself and make the creature partaker of the divine nature, this is what I mean when I say, that "truly gracious affections arise from those influences that are spiritual and divine."

From these things it is evident, that those gracious influences which the saints are the subjects of are entirely above nature, altogether of a different kind from any thing that men find in themselves by nature, or only in the exercise of natural principles, and are things which no improvement of principles that are natural, no advancing or exalting them to higher degrees, and no kind of composition of them, will ever [233] bring men to. Because they not only differ from what is natural, and from every thing that natural men experience, in *degree* and *circumstances* but also in *kind*, and are of a nature vastly more excellent. And this is what I mean when I say that "gracious affections are from those influences that are supernatural."

From hence it follows that in those gracious affections which are wrought through the saving influences of the Spirit of God there is a new inward *perception* or *sensation*, entirely different in its nature from any thing that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were sanctified. If grace be, in the sense above described, an entirely new kind of principle, then the exercises of it are also entirely a new kind of exercise. And if there be in the soul a new sort of exercises which it knew nothing of before, and which no improvement, composition, or management of what it was before conscious of could produce or any thing like it, then it follows that there is, as it were, a new *spiritual sense* in the mind, or an entirely new kind of *perception* or *spiritual sensation*, which is in its whole nature different from any former kinds of sensation. And something is perceived by a true saint, in the exercise of this new sense, in spiritual and divine things, as entirely diverse from any thing that is perceived in them, by natural men, as the taste of honey is diverse from the ideas men get of honey by only looking on and feeling it. So [234] that the spiritual perceptions which a spiritual person has are not only diverse from all that natural men have, after the manner that the ideas or perceptions of the same sense may differ one from another, but rather as the ideas and sensations of different senses differ.

II. Truly gracious affections are attended with a conviction of the *reality* and *certainty* of divine things.

This seems to be implied in the text that was laid as the foundation of this discourse, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

All truly gracious persons have a full and effectual conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel. They no longer halt between two opinions. The great doctrines of the gospel cease to be any longer doubtful things, but with them are settled and determined points, so that they are not afraid to venture their all upon them. Their conviction is *effectual*, so that the invisible things of the gospel have the *influence* of real and certain things upon them, have the *weight* and *power* of real things on their hearts, and accordingly rule in their affections and govern them through the course of their lives. They have not only an opinion that these things are true, but they *see that it is really so*. Their eyes being opened. And therefore these things are of great weight with them, and have a mighty [235] power upon their hearts and influence over their practice.

There are many religious affections which are not attended with such a conviction of the judgment. There are many apprehensions which some have, that they call divine discoveries, which are

affecting but not convincing. Though for a little while they may seem to be persuaded of the truth of the things of religion, yet they have no thorough effectual conviction, or at least there is no remarkable alteration. They live not under the influence of a realizing conviction of the infinite things which the gospel reveals. If they did, it would be impossible for them to live as they do.

But how do men attain this thorough conviction of the truth of the gospel? By the internal evidences of it, *by a sight of its glory*. Otherwise it is impossible that those who are illiterate, and unacquainted with history, should have any effectual conviction of it at all. They may, without this, see a great probability of it. But it is impossible that men who have not something of a general view of the historical world, or the series of history from age to age, should come at the force of arguments for the truth of Christianity, drawn from history, to that degree, as effectually to induce them to venture their all upon it. After all that learned men have said to them, there will remain innumerable doubts on their [236] minds. Now the gospel was not given only for learned men. There are at least nineteen in twenty, if not ninety-nine in a hundred, of those for whom the scriptures were written, that are not capable of any certain conviction of the divine authority of scripture by such arguments as learned men make use of. If men who have been brought up in heathenism must wait for a clear conviction of the truth of Christianity till they have learning and acquaintance with the history of politer nations enough to see the force of such kind of arguments, it will make the evidence of the gospel to them immensely cumbersome, and will render its propagation among them infinitely difficult.

It is unreasonable to suppose that God has provided for his people no more than probable evidences of the truth of the gospel. There is certainly some sort of evidence which God has given that the Christian religion is true, and that the gospel is his word, beyond mere probability. Doubtless there are some grounds of assurance held forth which, if we are not blind to them, tend to give an higher persuasion than any arguing from history and human tradition, which the illiterate are capable of—yea, which is good ground of the highest assurance that mankind have in any case whatsoever.

If we come to fact and experience, there is not the least reason to suppose that one in an hundred of those who have been sincere Christians [237] have come by their conviction of the truth of the gospel by arguments fetched from ancient traditions, histories, and monuments. Among the many thousands that died martyrs for Christ since the beginning of the Reformation, how few came by their assured persuasion this way? The greatest part of them were illiterate persons, many of whom were brought up in popish darkness and lived when such arguments were but very imperfectly handled. It is but lately that these arguments have been set in a clear light, even by learned men themselves. And since it has been done, there were never fewer thorough believers among those who have been educated in the true religion. Infidelity never prevailed so much in any age as in this wherein these arguments are handled to the greatest advantage.

The true martyrs of Jesus Christ are not those who have only been strong in opinion that the gospel of Christ is true but *those that have seen the truth of it*, as the very name of martyrs or witnesses (by which they are called in scripture) implies. Those are very improperly called witnesses of the truth of any thing who only declare they are of opinion such a thing is true. Those only are proper witnesses who testify that they have seen the truth of the thing they assert. But yet, it must be noted that among those who have a spiritual sight of the divine glory of the gospel, there is a great variety of degrees of [238] strength of faith, as there is a vast variety of the degrees of clearness of views of this glory. But there is no true and saving faith, or spiritual conviction of the truth of the gospel, that has not this manifestation of its internal evidence in some degree.

The gospel does not go abroad a begging for its evidence so much as some think. It has its highest evidence in itself. Still great use may be made of external arguments, and they are not to be neglected, for they may be serviceable to awaken unbelievers and bring them to serious consideration, and to confirm the faith of true saints. Yea, they may be in some respects subservient *to the begetting* of saving faith in men. And yet it remains true, that there is no spiritual conviction but what arises from an apprehension of the spiritual beauty and glory of divine things.

But I proceed to another distinguishing sign of gracious affections.

III. Gracious affections are attended with *evangelical humiliation*.

Evangelical humiliation is a sense that a Christian has of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness, with an answerable frame of heart. There is a distinction to be made between a *legal* and *evangelical* humiliation. In a *legal humiliation* men are convinced that they are exceeding sinful and guilty, but they do not see their own *odiousness* on the account of sin, nor the hateful nature of sin—a sense of this is given [239] in *evangelical humiliation*, by a discovery of God's holiness.

They that are destitute of this have no true religion, whatever profession they may make. God has abundantly manifested in his word that nothing is acceptable to him without it. As we would make the holy scriptures our rule in judging of our own state, it concerns us greatly to look at this humiliation as one of the most essential things pertaining to real Christianity.

It is true that many professors make great pretences to humility, as well as other graces. Many of them are much in declaring that they are humble, and telling how they were humbled to the dust at such and such times, and abounding in very bad expressions about themselves; such as, "I am a poor vile creature! Oh, I have a dreadful wicked heart! My heart is worse than the devil! Oh, this cursed heart of mine!" Such expressions are very often used, not with a heart that is broken, not with spiritual mourning, but with a light air, with smiles in the countenance. And we must believe that they are humble upon the credit of their *say so*, for there is nothing of the savour of humility in the manner of their deportment. There are many that are full of expressions of their own vileness who yet expect to be looked upon as eminent saints by others, and it is dangerous for any to carry it towards them any otherwise than as some of the chief of Christians. There are many that are much in crying [240] out of their wicked hearts, and their great shortcomings, and unprofitableness, and speaking as though they looked on themselves as the meanest of the saints—who yet, if a minister should seriously tell them the same things in private and should signify that they were very low and weak Christians, they would think themselves highly injured, and there would be danger of a rooted prejudice in them against such a minister.

There is a sort of men who abundantly cry down works, and cry up faith in opposition to works, and set up themselves much as evangelical persons, in opposition to those that are of a legal spirit, and make a fair show of advancing Christ and the gospel, and the way of free grace—who are indeed some of the greatest enemies to the gospel way of free grace and the most dangerous opposers of pure, humble Christianity.

There is a pretended humiliation, and being dead to the law and emptied of self, which is one of the biggest and most elated things in the world. Some who think themselves quite emptied of themselves, and are confident that they are abased in the dust, are as full as they can hold with the glory of their own humility, and lifted up to heaven with a high opinion of their abasement. Their humility is a swelling, self-conceited, confident, showy, noisy, assuming humility. It is astonishing how greatly many are deceived about themselves as to this matter, imagining [241] themselves most humble when they are most proud. The deceitfulness of the heart appears in no thing so much as this of spiritual pride.

But though spiritual pride be so subtle an iniquity, yet there are two things by which it may surely be discovered.

The *first* is, he that is under the prevalence of this distemper is apt to think highly of his attainments in religion, compared with others. It is natural for him to fall into that thought of himself that the uppermost seat belongs to him, and that others should yield to him and regard him as a master in matters of religion.

But he whose heart is under the powers of Christian humility is apt to think his attainments comparatively mean, and to esteem himself low among the saints. Such a one is not apt to assume authority and to take upon him to be chief manager, but rather to be subject to others.

There are some persons experiences that naturally work that way, and they often speak of them as the "great things they have met with." This may be spoken and meant in a good sense. In one sense, every

degree of saving mercy is a *great thing*, and the more humble a person is that hopes God has bestowed such mercy on him, the more apt will he be to call it a “great thing that he has met with.” But if by “great things which they have experienced” they mean comparatively great spiritual experiences, which is often the case, then for a person to say “I have met with great [242] things” is the same as to say “I am an eminent saint” and have more grace than ordinary. For to have great experiences is the same as to have great grace. The persons that talk thus about their experiences expect that others should admire them. Indeed they do not call it boasting to talk thus, because they say “they know it was not they that did it, it was free grace.” But their verbally ascribing it to the grace of God does not hinder their forwardness to think highly of their holiness. Were they under the influence of an humble spirit, their attainments would not be so apt to shine in their own eyes.

Such is the nature of grace that Christians in the present state look upon their goodness as little, and their deformity as great; and they that have most grace have most of this disposition, as will appear to any that considers the things following.

That grace is worthy to be called little that is little in comparison to what it ought to be, and so it seems to one that is truly gracious. For he has his eye upon the rule of his duty, a conformity to that is what he aims at, and it is by that he judges of what he does and hath. To a gracious soul, especially if eminently so, *that* holiness appears little which is little of what it should be, little of what he sees infinite reason for and obligation to. If his holiness appears to him to be at a vast distance from this, it naturally appears little in his eyes. [243]

True grace opens to a person’s view the infinite reason there is that he should be holy in a high degree. And the more grace he has, the more this is opened to his view. The greater sense he has of the obligations he is under to love God and Christ. The more he apprehends, the more the smallness of his grace and love appears strange and wonderful; and therefore he is more ready to think that others are beyond him. Wondering at the littleness of his own grace, he can scarce believe that so strange a thing happens to other saints. It is amazing to him that one that is really a child of God should love no more. And he is apt to look upon it as a thing peculiar to himself, for he sees only the outside of other Christians but he sees his own inside.

Grace and love in the most eminent saints are truly very little in comparison of what they might be. Because the highest love that any attain to is poor, and not worthy to be named, in comparison of what our obligations appear to be from the joint consideration of these two things, viz.: 1) the reasons God has given us to love him, in the manifestations he has made of his glory; and 2) the capacity there is in the soul, by those intellectual faculties which God has given it, of seeing and understanding these reasons. He that has much grace estimates his love by the whole height of his duty, and hence it appears astonishingly little and low in his eyes.

The nature of great discoveries (as they are [244] called) in many persons is to hide the corruption of their hearts, and to make it seem to them as if all their sin was gone.

The more eminent saints are, and the more they have of the light of heaven in their souls, the more do they appear to themselves as the most eminent saints in this world do to the angels in heaven. Now we can suppose no other than that the highest attainments of the former appear mean to the latter, because these dwell in the light of God’s glory and see him as he is.

I would not be understood that the saints on earth have in all respects the worst opinion of themselves when they have most grace. In many respects it is otherwise. With respect to positive corruption, they may appear to themselves freest when grace is most in exercise. But yet it is true that the children of God never have so much conviction of their deformity, and so abasing a sense of their present vileness, as when they are highest in the exercise of grace.

IV. Another thing wherein gracious affections distinguished from others is that *they are attended with a change of nature*.

All gracious affections arise from a spiritual understanding, in which the soul has the excellency of divine things discovered to it. But all spiritual discoveries are transforming, and not only make an

alteration of the present sensation of the soul but in the very nature of it. Such power [245] this is properly divine, and is peculiar to *the Spirit of the Lord*. Other power may make a great alteration in men's present tempers, but it is the power of a creator only that can change the nature. And no discoveries but those that are supernatural will have this supernatural effect. But this effect all these discoveries have that are truly divine. The soul is deeply affected by these discoveries, and so affected as to be transformed.

Therefore if there be no such change in persons that think they have experienced a work of conversion, vain are all their imaginations, however they have been affected. Conversion is a great and universal change of the man, turning him from sin to God. If therefore, after a person's supposed conversion, there is no sensible or remarkable alteration in him, as to those bad qualities and evil habits which before were visible in him, and he is ordinarily under the prevalence of the same dispositions that he used to be—he appears as selfish, as stupid, and perverse, as unchristian and unsavory as ever—it is a greater evidence against him than the brightest story of experiences that ever was told is for him.

Indeed allowances must be made for the natural temper. Those sins which a man was most inclined to before his conversion, him may be most apt to fall into still. But yet conversion will make a great alteration even with respect [246] to these. If a man before his conversion was by his constitution inclined to lasciviousness, or drunkenness, or maliciousness, converting grace will make a great alteration in him, so that they shall no longer have dominion over him.

There is a sort of high affections that some have from time to time that leave them without any abiding effect. They go off suddenly. So that from the very height of their emotion, they pass at once to be quite dead. It surely is not wont to be thus with high gracious affections. They leave a sweet relish of divine things on the heart, and a stronger bent of soul towards God and holiness.

V. Truly gracious affections differ from those that are false in that they naturally beget and promote *such a spirit of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness, and mercy as appeared in Christ*.

The evidence of this in the scripture is very abundant. If we judge of the proper spirit of the gospel by the word of God, this spirit is what may, by way of eminence, be called the Christian spirit, and may be looked upon as the true and distinguishing disposition of Christians. When some of the disciples of Christ said something that was not agreeable to such a spirit, Christ told them that they “knew not what manner of spirit they were of” (Luke 9:55), implying that this spirit is the proper spirit of his religion. All that are truly godly are of this spirit. It [247] is the Spirit by which they are so governed, that it is their true and proper character.

Every thing that appertains to holiness of heart does indeed belong to the nature of true Christianity. But a spirit of holiness appearing in some particular graces may more especially be called the Christian spirit. There are some amiable qualities that more especially agree with the nature of the gospel; such are humility, meekness, love, forgiveness, and mercy. These therefore especially belong to the character of Christians.

These things are spoken of as what are especially the character of Christ himself, the great head of the Christian church. And as these are especially the character of Christ, so they are also of Christians. Christians are Christ-like. None deserve the name of Christians who are not so in their prevailing character.

Meekness is so much the character of the saints that “the meek” and “the godly” are used as synonymous terms in scripture.

But some may say, “Is there no such thing as Christian fortitude, boldness for Christ, being good soldiers in the Christian warfare?”

I answer, there is. The whole Christian life is compared to a warfare. And the most eminent Christians are the best soldiers, endowed with the greatest degrees of fortitude. But many persons seem to be quite mistaken concerning the nature of Christian fortitude. It is not brutal fierceness. True Christian fortitude consists in strength of [248] mind, through grace, exerted in two things: in ruling and suppressing of evil and unruly passions; and in steadfastly following good affections, without being

hindered by sinful fear or the opposition of enemies. But the passions that are restrained in this Christian fortitude are those very passions that are vigorously exerted in false boldness. And those affections that are vigorously exerted in true fortitude are those holy affections that are directly contrary to them.

Though Christian fortitude appears in withstanding the enemies that are without us, yet it is much more evident in resisting the enemies that are within us. The strength of the good soldier of Jesus Christ appears in nothing more than in steadfastly maintaining the holy calm, meekness, sweetness, and benevolence of his mind amidst all the storms, injuries, and surprising events of this evil world. The scripture intimates that true fortitude consists chiefly in this: “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city” (Prov. 16: 32).

The way to make a right judgment what holy fortitude is, in fighting with God’s enemies, is to look to the captain of our salvation, even to Jesus in the time of his last sufferings, when his enemies made their most violent attack on him. How did he show his boldness? Not in any fiery passions. Not in fierce and violent speeches, and crying out of the wickedness of opposers, giving them their own in [249] plain terms. But in not opening his mouth in reproaches, praying that the father would forgive his murderers. Not in shedding the blood of others, but with all-conquering patience and love, shedding his own. Indeed one of his disciples, that made a pretence to *boldness for Christ*, began to lay about him with his sword; but Christ quickly rebukes him, and heals the wound he gives. And never was the patience, meekness, love, and forgiveness of Christ in so glorious a manifestation as at that time.

When persons are fierce and violent, and exert their sharp and bitter passions, it shows weakness instead of strength. “Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions; are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”

There is a pretended boldness for Christ that arises from no better principle than pride. Men may be forward to expose themselves to the dislike of the world, and even to provoke their displeasure out of pride, that they may be more highly exalted among their own party. That duty which tries whether a man is willing to be despised by them that are of his own party is a much more proper trial of his boldness for Christ than his being forward to expose himself to the reproach of opposers. He is bold for Christ that has Christian fortitude to confess his fault openly, when he has committed one that requires it, and as it were to come down upon his knees before opposers. Such things as these are far greater evidences of holy boldness than resolutely and fiercely confronting opposers. [250]

As some are much mistaken concerning the nature of true boldness for Christ, so they are concerning Christian zeal. It is indeed a flame, but a sweet one. Or rather it is the heat and fervor of a sweet flame, for the flame of which it is the heat is no other than that of divine love. Zeal is the fervor of this flame, as it vigorously goes out towards the good that is its object, in desires of it, and consequently in opposition to the evil that is contrary to it. There is indeed opposition, and vigorous opposition, that is an attendant upon it; but it is against *things*, and not *persons*. Bitterness against the *persons* of men is no part of it, but is contrary to it. And as to what opposition there is in it to *things*, it is first and chiefly against the *evil things* in the person himself who has this zeal, against the enemies of God and holiness that are in his own heart, and but secondarily against the sins of others. And therefore there is nothing in true Christian zeal that is contrary to the spirit of meekness, gentleness, and love; but it is entirely agreeable to it, and tends to promote it.

But to say something particularly concerning this Christian spirit I have been speaking of, as exercised in these three things—*forgiveness*, *love*, and *mercy*. I would observe that the scripture is very clear and express concerning the absolute necessity of each of these, as belonging to the temper of every Christian. It is so as to a [251] *forgiving spirit*, or a disposition to overlook and forgive injuries. Christ gives it to us both as a negative and positive evidence, and is express in teaching us that if we are of such a spirit, it is a sign that we are in a state of forgiveness ourselves, and that if we are not of such a spirit, we are not forgiven of God.

And the scripture is as plain as possible that none are true saints, but those that are of a disposition to *pity* and *relieve* their fellow-creatures. “If a brother or sister be naked, and one of you say,

Depart in peace—notwithstanding ye give them not those things that are needful to the body— what doth it profit?” (James 3:15–16). “Whoso has the world’s goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17). Christ, in that description he gives of the day of judgment (Matt. 25), represents that judgment will be passed at that day according as men have been found to have been of a merciful spirit and practice, or otherwise.

Some place religion so much in certain transient illuminations (especially if they are in such a particular method and order) and so little in the spirit and temper persons are of, that they greatly deform religion, and form notions of Christianity quite different from the scriptures. The scripture knows of no such Christians as are of a sordid, selfish, cross and contentious spirit. Nothing can be invented that is a greater absurdity [252] than a morose, hard, close, high-spirited, spiteful Christian. We must learn the way of bringing men to rules, and not rules to men, and so strain the rules of God’s word, to take in ourselves and some of our neighbors, till we make them wholly of none effect.

VI. Gracious affections *soften the heart*, and are attended and followed with a *Christian tenderness* of spirit.

False affections tend to stupify the mind, and the effect of them at last is that persons become less affected with their present and past sins, and less conscientious with respect to future sins, less moved with the cautions of God’s word or God’s chastisements in his providences, less afraid of the appearance of evil, than they were while under legal awakenings. Now [that] they look on their state to be safe, they can be more easy than before in the neglect of duties that are troublesome, and are not so alarmed at their own defects. Formerly, under convictions, they took much pains in religion, and denied themselves in many things. But now they think themselves out of danger, they put off this burden of the cross, and allow themselves more of the enjoyment of their ease and their lusts.

Such persons as these, instead of embracing Christ as their *savior from sin*, trust in him as the *savior of their sins*. They trust in him to preserve to them the quiet enjoyment of their sins, and to be their shield to defend them from [253] God’s displeasure, while they come close to him to fight against him. However, some of these, at the same time, make a great profession of love to God and assurance of his favor.

Gracious affections are of a contrary tendency, turning a heart of stone, more and more, into a heart of flesh. An holy love and hope are more efficacious upon the heart, to make it tender and fill it with a dread of sin, or whatever might displease God, and to engage it to watchfulness and care and strictness, than a slavish fear of hell. And let it be observed that holy fear is so much the nature of true godliness that it is called in scripture by no other name more frequently than the *fear of God*.

Hence gracious affections do not tend to make men bold, forward, noisy and boisterous, but rather to *speak trembling*.

But some may object. “Is there no such thing as a holy boldness in prayer, and the duties of divine worship?” I answer, there is doubtless such a thing. But this is not opposite to *reverence*, though it be to *servility*. No boldness in poor sinful worms, that have a right sight of God and themselves, will prompt them to approach God with less fear and reverence than glorious angels in heaven, who cover their faces before his throne. There is in some persons a most unsufferable boldness in their addresses to the great Jehovah, in an affectation of an holy boldness and ostentation of eminent nearness and [254] familiarity—the very thoughts of which would make them shrink into nothing, with horror and confusion, if they saw the distance that is between God and them. It becomes such sinful creatures as we to approach a holy God (although with faith, and without terror, yet) with contrition and penitent shame and confusion of face.

One reason why gracious affections are attended with tenderness of spirit is that true grace tends to promote convictions of conscience. Persons are wont to have convictions before they believe. And afterwards peace in believing has a tendency to put an end to *terrors*, but not to *convictions of sin*. It does not stupify a man’s conscience, but makes it more sensible. Grace tends to give the soul a further and better *conviction* of the same things concerning sin that it was *convinced* of under a legal work, viz., its

great contrariety to the will and law of God, the greatness of God's displeasure against it, and the dreadful punishment it deserves.

All gracious affections have a tendency to promote tenderness of heart—not only a godly sorrow, but also a gracious joy and a gracious hope. The most confident hope that is truly gracious has this tendency. The banishing of a servile fear, by a holy assurance, is attended with a proportionable increase of reverential fear. The diminishing of the fear of the fruits of God's displeasure is attended with a proportionable increase [255] of fear of his displeasure itself; the diminishing of the fear of hell, with an increase of the fear of sin. The vanishing of jealousies of the person's state is attended with a proportionable increase of jealousy of his heart.

VII. Another thing wherein those affections that are truly gracious differ from those that are false is *beautiful symmetry and proportion*.

Not that this symmetry of the virtues and gracious affections is perfect. It often is in many things defective, through the imperfection of grace, for want of proper instructions, through errors in judgment or some particular unhappiness of natural temper, and many other disadvantages. But yet there is not that disproportion in gracious affections and the various parts of true religion that is commonly to be observed in false religion.

In truly holy affections is found that proportion which is the natural consequence of the universality of their sanctification. They have the whole image of Christ upon them. They have “put off the old man and put on the new man” entire, in all his parts and members. They that are Christ's “do all this fulness receive, grace for grace”; i.e., grace answerable to grace—there is no grace in Christ but there is its image in believers, there is feature for feature and member for member.

But it is with the unconverted as it is with Ephraim of old. Ephraim “is a cake not turned,” [256] half roasted and half raw. There is commonly no uniformity in their affections. There is great affection in some things and no manner of proportion in others. An holy hope and holy fear go together in true believers. But in some is the most confident hope, while they are void of reverence, self-jealousy, and caution, and to a great degree cast off fear.

Nor only is there an essential deficiency as to the various kinds of religious affections, but also a strange disproportion in the same affections with regard to different objects.

Thus, as to *love*, some make a great show of love to God and Christ but they have not a love and benevolence towards men, but are disposed to contention, envy, and revenge, and will, it may be, suffer an old grudge to rest in their bosoms for years, living in bitterness of spirit towards their neighbour. On the other hand, there are others that appear as if they had a great benevolence to men but have no love to God.

And as to love to men, there are some that have flowing affections to some, but their love is not of an extensive and universal nature. They are full of dear affections to some and bitterness towards others. They are knit to their own party, but are fierce against those that oppose them. Some pretend to be ravished with the company of the children of God *abroad*, and at the same time are churlish towards their wives and other [257] near relations *at home*, and negligent of relative duties. And as to the great love to sinners, that there is an appearance of in some, even to extreme distress, they single out a particular person from among the multitude but at the same time have no general compassion to sinners that are in equally miserable circumstances.

As there is a monstrous disproportion in the love of some in its exercises towards different persons, so there is in their exercises of love towards the same persons. Some show a love to others as to their outward man, but have no love to the souls of men. Others pretend a great love to men's souls, but are not compassionate toward their bodies. The making a great show of love for souls costs them nothing, but in order to show mercy to men's bodies they must part with money out of their pockets. But Christian love to our brethren extends both to their souls and bodies, and herein is like the love of Jesus Christ.

Here by the way, I would observe, it may be laid down as a general rule that if persons pretend they are come to high attainments in religion, but have never yet arrived to the less, it is a bad sign. As if

persons pretend that they have got beyond mere *morality*, to live a *spiritual* and *divine* life, but really have not come to be so much as *moral* persons. Or pretend to be greatly [258] affected with the wickedness of their hearts, and are not affected with the palpable violations of God's commands in their practice. Or pretend that they are not afraid to venture their souls upon Christ for their eternal welfare, but at the same time have not confidence enough in God to trust him with a little of their estates, for pious and charitable uses. I say, when it is thus with persons, their pretences are manifestly vain.

The same that has been observed of the affection of *love* is also to be observed of *other* religious affections. Those that are true extend, in some proportion, to the various things that are their proper objects. But when they are false, they are commonly strangely disproportionate. So it is with religious *desires*. These in true believers are to those things that are excellent in general, and that in some proportion to their excellency. But in false longings, it is often far otherwise. They will run with vehemence after something of less importance, when other things of greater importance are neglected.

And so as to *zeal*. When it is from right principles, it is against sin in general, in some proportion to the degree of sinfulness. But false zeal against sin is against some particular sin only. Thus some seem to be very zealous against profaneness, and pride in apparel, who themselves are notorious for covetousness, and it may be backbiting, envy, turbulence of spirit, or ill-will to them that have injured them. False zeal [259] is against the sins of others, while men have no zeal against their own sins. But he that has true zeal exercises it chiefly against his own sins, though he shows also a proper zeal against dangerous iniquity in others.

VIII. Another distinguishing difference between gracious affections and others is that *the higher they are raised, the more is the appetite and longing after spiritual attainments increased*.

The more a true Christian loves God, the more he desires to love him. The more he hates sin, the more he desires to hate it. The kindling of gracious affections is like kindling a flame. The higher it is raised, the more ardent it is. So the appetite after holiness is much more lively and keen in those that are eminent in holiness than in others.

But with mixed or degenerating religious affections it is otherwise. If before there was a great desire after grace, as these affections rise *that* desire ceases or is abated. It may be before, while the man was afraid of hell, he earnestly longed that he might obtain faith in Christ and love to God. But now that he is confident he is converted, there are no more earnest longings after light and grace. He is confident that his sins are forgiven him, and that he shall go to heaven, and so is satisfied.

Lastly, gracious affections *have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice*. [260]

But what is implied in this?

1. That men should be universally obedient. "Every man that has this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure. Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not. Whosoever sinneth has not seen him, neither known him." (1 John 3:3ff). "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). "If one member only be corrupt, and we do not cut it off, it will carry the whole body to hell" (Matt. 5:29–30).

2. In order to men's being true Christians, it is necessary that we prosecute the business of religion with earnestness and diligence. All Christ's "peculiar people" not only do but are "zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14). Christians are not called to idleness, but to labor in God's vineyard. Their work is everywhere compared in the New Testament to those exercises wherein men are wont to exert their strength with the greatest earnestness—as running, wrestling, fighting. The kingdom of heaven is not to be taken but by violence. Without earnestness there is no getting along in that narrow way that leads to life, no ascending the steep and high hill of Zion, and so no arriving at the heavenly city on the top of it. There is need that we should "watch and pray always"; that we should "put on the whole armor of God"; that we should [261] "forget the things which are behind, and be reaching forth to the things that are before." Slothfulness in the service of God is as damning as open rebellion. For the slothful servant is a wicked servant, and shall be cast into outer darkness, among God's enemies (Matt, 25:26, 30). They that

are slothful are not “followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

A true Christian perseveres in this way of universal obedience, through all the various trials he meets with. That all those who obtain eternal life persevere in the practice of religion and the service of God is a doctrine abundantly taught in scripture, that particularly to rehearse the texts which imply it is needless.

The tendency of grace in the heart to holy practice is direct, and the connection close and necessary. True grace is not an inactive, barren thing, for it is, in its very nature, a principle of holy action. Regeneration has a direct relation to practice, for it is the end of it, with a view to which the whole work is wrought. All is framed in this mighty change, so as directly to tend to this end: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph. 2:10). Yea it is the very end of the redemption of Christ, “who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” (Tit. 2:14). Holy practice is as much the end of all [262] that God does about his saints as fruit is the end of all that the husbandman does about the growth of his field. And therefore every thing in a true Christian is calculated to reach this end. This fruit of holy practice is what every grace, and every discovery, and every individual thing which belongs to Christian experience, has a direct tendency to.

From what has been said, it is manifest that Christian practice, or a holy life, is a *distinguishing sign* of true grace. But I may further assert that it is the *chief* of all the signs of grace, both as an evidence of the sincerity of Christians to others and also to their own consciences.

But then it is necessary that it be well understood in what sense Christian practice is the *greatest sign* of grace.

And it is so as a manifestation of the sincerity of a Christian *to his neighbors*. Now that this is the *chief sign* of grace in this respect is very evident from the word of God. Christ, who knew best how to give us rules to judge of others, has repeated it. “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16). Christ nowhere says ye shall know the tree by its leaves or flowers, or ye shall know men by their talk, or by the manner and air of their speaking, or by their speaking feelingly, or by their tears and affectionate expressions, or by the affections ye feel in your hearts towards them; but “By their fruits shall ye know them.” And as [263] this is the evidence that Christ has directed us chiefly to look at in others, so it is the evidence that Christ has chiefly directed us to give to others. “Let your light so shine before men, that others seeing your good works, may glorify your Father, which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Christ does not say that hearing your good words, but “that others seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

And as the scripture teaches that practice is the best evidence of sincerity, so reason teaches the same thing. Reason shows that men’s deeds are more faithful interpreters of their minds than their words. The common sense of mankind teaches them to judge of men’s hearts chiefly by their practice in other matters—as whether a man be a loyal subject, a true lover, a dutiful child, or a faithful servant. A wise man will trust to practical evidences of the sincerity of friendship, further than a thousand earnest professions. Now there is equal reason why practice should be looked upon as the best evidence of friendship towards Christ. Reason says the same that Christ said, “He that has my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loves me” (John 4:21). If a man, in declaring his experiences, tells how he found his heart weaned from the world, and saw the vanity of it at such and such times, and professes that he gives up all to God, yet in his practice is violent in pursuing the world, and what he gets he keeps [264] close; if there is another that says not a great deal, yet appears ready to forsake the world, whenever it stands in the way of his duty; we believe this man to be weaned from it, not the former.

And as Christian practice is the *best evidence* of our sincerity to others, so it is a sure evidence of grace to a *person’s own conscience*. This is very plain in “Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1John 2:3). And, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed (in the original it is *εργω*, *in work*) and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him” (1 John 3:18–19).

For the greater clearness in this matter, I would: *first*, show how Christian practice, or keeping Christ's commandments, is to be taken, when the scripture represents it as a sure evidence to our own consciences that we are sincere Christians; and *secondly*, prove that this is the chief of all evidences that men can have of their own sincere godliness.

First, I would show how Christian practice is to be taken when the scripture represents it as a sure evidence to our own consciences that we are sincere Christians.

And here I would observe, we cannot reasonably suppose that when the scripture, in this case, speaks of good works, the keeping Christ's commandments, [265] it has respect merely to what is external, or the action of the body, without regard to the intention of the agent, or any act of his understanding or will. The actions of the body, taken thus, are neither acts of obedience nor disobedience.

But obedience and good works, given in scripture as a sure evidence to our own consciences of true grace, include the obedience and practice of the soul, as preceding and governing the actions of the body. So when we are told that men shall be judged at the last day, "according to their works," and "all shall receive according to the things done in the body," it is not to be understood only of outward acts. For if so, why is God so often spoken of as searching the hearts and trying the reins, "that he may render to everyone according to his works"? If only the actions of the body are meant, what need "of searching the heart and reins," in order to know them?

A common acquaintance with the scripture, together with a little attention, will show to anyone that this is ten times more insisted on as a mark of true piety, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the Revelation, than any thing else. In the New Testament, where Christ and his apostles expressly lay down signs of true godliness, this is almost wholly insisted upon. Indeed, in many of these places "love to the brethren" [266] is spoken of as a sign of godliness, and there is no one virtuous affection so often spoken of as a sign of true grace as our having love one to another. But then the scriptures explain themselves to intend chiefly this love as exercised in practice. So that when the scripture so much insists on our loving one another, as a great sign of godliness, we are not thereby to understand the workings of affection which men feel, so much as the practicing all the duties of the second table. All which, the New Testament tells us again and again, a true love comprehends. Holy practice is the mark chosen out from all others to be insisted on, which is an invincible argument that it is the chief of all the evidences of godliness. And surely those things which Christ and his apostles chiefly insisted on in the rules they gave, ministers ought chiefly to regard in the rules they give. To insist much on those things that the scripture insists little on, and to insist very little on those things on which the scripture insists much, is a dangerous thing, because this is to judge ourselves, and guide others, in an unscriptural manner. God knew which way of leading souls was safest. This is the reason why he insisted so much on some things, and let others more alone. The scriptures were made for man. We should therefore make them our guide in all things. And or us [267] to make that great which the scripture makes little, and that little which the scripture makes great, tends to give us a monstrous idea of religion, and (at least indirectly and gradually) to lead us wholly away from the right rule, and to establish delusions.

Another thing which makes it evident that holy practice is the chief of all the signs of sincerity, not only to the world but to our own consciences, is that this is the grand evidence which will hereafter be made use of before the judgment-seat of God, according to which his judgment will be regulated and the state of every professor unalterably determined. In the future judgment, there will be an open trial of all, and evidences will be made use of. For God's future judging of men, in order to their eternal retribution, will not be his passing a judgment upon them in his own mind, but it will be the manifestation of his judgment, and the righteousness of it, to men's own consciences and to the world. And therefore, though God needs no medium, whereby to make the truth evident to himself, yet evidences will be made use of in his future judging of men. And doubtless the evidences that will be made use of in their trial will be such as are best fitted to serve the ends of the judgment, viz., the manifestation of the righteous judgment of God, not only to the world but to men's own consciences. But the scriptures abundantly teach that the grand evidence [268] which the judge will make use of will be men's works, or practice, here in this

world. “For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.”

Hence we may undoubtedly infer that men’s works are the highest evidences by which they ought to try themselves. Certainly that which our supreme judge will chiefly make use of, to judge us by, when we come to stand before him, we should chiefly make use of to judge ourselves by.

Now from all that has been said, it is abundantly manifest that Christian practice is the most proper evidence of our gracious sincerity, to ourselves and others, and the chief of all the marks of grace. I had rather have the testimony of my conscience that I have such a saying of my supreme judge on my side, as that “He that has my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loves me” (John 14:21), than the fullest approbation of all the wise and experienced divines that have lived this thousand years on the most exact and critical examination of my experiences.

Christian practice is the sign of signs. It is the great evidence which confirms and crowns all other signs of godliness. There is no one grace of the Spirit of God, but Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the truth of it. [269]

Holy practice is the proper proof of the true and saving *knowledge of God*. “Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). It is also of *repentance*. John, when the Jews professed repentance upon coming to his baptism, directed them to “bring forth fruits meet for repentance” (Matt. 3:8). In like manner of a *saving faith*, as appears from the apostle James speaking of works as what do eminently prove faith, and manifest our sincerity. It is, of a saving *belief of the truth*. That is spoken of as the proper evidence of the truth’s being in a Christian, that “he walks in the truth” (3 John 3). It is the most proper evidence of a true *coming to Christ*, and *accepting* of and *closing* with him. A true and saving coming to Christ is (as Christ often teaches) a coming so as to forsake all for him. As hath been observed, to forsake all for Christ in heart is the same thing as to have a heart actually to forsake all. But the proper evidence of having such a heart is indeed actually to forsake all, so far as called to it. Christ and other things are set before us together, for us to cleave to the one and forsake the other. In such a case, a practical cleaving to Christ is an *acceptance* of him.

Practice is the most proper evidence of *trusting in Christ for salvation*. The proper signification of the word “trust,” both in common speech and in the holy scriptures, is the encouragement of a person to run some venture on the credit of [270] another’s sufficiency and faithfulness. And therefore the proper evidence of his trusting is *the venture he runs in what he does*. Hence it is that persons complying with the difficulties and dangers of Christian practice, in a dependence on Christ’s sufficiency and faithfulness, are said to venture themselves upon Christ and trust in him for happiness and life. They depend on such promises as that, “He that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it” (Matt. 10:39). He that, on the credit of what he hears of a future world, forsakes all, at least as far as there is occasion, making every thing give place to his eternal interest—he, and he only, may probably be said to venture himself on the Gospel. And this is the proper evidence of a true trust in Christ for salvation.

Practice is the proper evidence of *love*, both to God and men. It is also of *humility*. For that manifestation of heart-humility which God speaks of consists in “walking humbly” (Mic. 6:8). It is likewise of the true *fear of God*. “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Prov. 8:13). “By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil” (Prov. 16:6). So practice, in rendering again according to benefits received, is the proper evidence of true *thankfulness*. “What shall I render to the Lord, for all his benefits towards me?” (Ps. 116:12). So the proper evidence of *gracious desires and longings* is that they are effectual in practice, to stir up persons earnestly to seek the [271] things they long for. “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after” (Ps. 27:4).

Practice is the proper evidence of a gracious *hope*. “Every man that has this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). Patient continuance in well-doing, through the difficulties of the Christian course, is often mentioned as the proper expression of a Christian hope. A cheerful practice of our duty, and doing the will of God, is the proper evidence of a truly *holy joy*. “Thou meetest him that rejoiceth, and worketh righteousness” (Isa. 64:5). “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever, for

they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end” (Ps. 119:111–12).

And as holy practice is the chief evidence of the truth of grace, so the degree in which experience influences a person’s practice is the surest evidence of the degree of that which is spiritual and divine in his experiences. Whatever pretences persons may make to great discoveries, great love and joy, they are no further to be regarded than they have influence on their practice. Not but that allowances must be made for the natural temper. But that does not hinder, but that the degree of grace is justly measured by the degree of the effect in practice, for the effect of grace is as great, and the alteration as remarkable, in a person of a very ill natural temper as another. Although a person of such a temper [272] will not behave himself so well, with the same degree of grace as another, the diversity from what was before conversion may be as great, because a person of good natural temper did not behave himself so ill before conversion.

Thus I have endeavored to represent the evidence there is that Christian practice is the *chief* of all the signs of saving grace. But, before I conclude, I would say something briefly in answer to two objections.

1. Some may say this seems to be contrary to that opinion, so much received among good people, that we should judge of our state chiefly by our inward experience, and that spiritual experiences are the main evidences of true grace.

I answer, It is doubtless a true opinion, and justly much received, that we should chiefly judge of our state by our experience. But it is a great mistake that what has been said is at all contrary to that opinion. Christian practice is spiritual practice—the practice of spirit and body jointly, or the practice of a spirit animating, commanding, and actuating a body to which it is united. And therefore the main thing in this holy practice is the holy acts of the mind, directing and governing the motions of the body. And the motions of the body are to be looked upon as belonging to Christian practice only as they are dependant on the acts of the soul. The exercises of grace that Christians find within [273] themselves are what they *experience* within themselves, and herein therefore lies Christian experience. And this Christian experience consists as much in those exercises of grace in the will, that are immediately concerned in the behavior of the body, as in other exercises. These inward exercises are not the less a part of Christian experience because they have outward behavior connected with them.

To speak of Christian experience and practice as if they were two things, entirely distinct, is to make a distinction without all reason. Indeed all Christian experience is not properly called practice. But all Christian practice is properly experience. And the distinction that is made between them is not only an unreasonable, but an unscriptural distinction. Holy practice is one part of Christian experience, and both reason and scripture represent it as the chief and most important part of it. So it is represented in Jer. 22:15–16: “Did not thy father eat and drink, and do justice and judgment? ... He judged the cause of the poor and needy. Was not this to know me? says the Lord.” Our inward acquaintance with God surely belongs to the head of experimental religion. But these the scriptures represent as consisting chiefly in practice. The exercises of those graces of the love of God, and the fear of God, are a part of experimental religion. But these the scriptures represent as consisting chiefly in practice (1 John 5:3; 2 John 6; [274] Psalm 34:11, etc.). Such experiences as these the psalmist chiefly insists on. Such the apostle Paul mainly insists upon when he speaks of his experiences in his epistles. And such as these they were that this blessed apostle chiefly comforted himself in the consideration of, when he was going to martyrdom. “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim. 4:6–7).

And not only does the most important part of Christian experience lie in spiritual practice, but nothing is so properly called by the name of *experimental religion*. For that experience which is in these exercises of grace, that prove effectual at the very point of trial, are the proper *experiment* of the truth of our godliness, wherein its victorious power is found by *experience*. This is properly Christian experience, wherein we have opportunity to see, by *actual experience and trial*, whether we have a heart to do the will of God and to forsake other things for Christ, or no.

There is a sort of external religious practice, wherein is no inward experience. But this is good for nothing. And there is what is called experience that is without practice, and this is worse than nothing. Many persons seem to have wrong notions of Christian experience and spiritual light and discoveries. Whenever a person finds a heart to trust God as God, at the time that [275] he has the trial, and finds his disposition effectual in the experiment, that is the most proper and distinguishing experience. And to have at such a time that sense of divine things, which governs his heart and hands, this is the most excellent spiritual light, and these are the most distinguishing discoveries.

Indeed the witness or seal of the Spirit consists in the effect of the Spirit of God in the heart, in the implantation and exercises of grace there, and so consists in experience. And it is beyond doubt that this seal of the Spirit is the highest kind of evidence of our adoption that ever we obtain. But in these exercises of grace in practice God gives witness, and sets to his seal, in the most conspicuous, eminent and evident manner. It has been abundantly found to be true in fact, by the experience of the Christian church, that Christ commonly gives by his Spirit the greatest and most joyful evidences of sonship in those effectual exercises of grace, under trials, which have been spoken of; as is manifest in the full assurance and unspeakable joys of many of the martyrs.

2. Some may object that this is *legal* doctrine, and that making practice of such great importance in religion magnifies *works*, and leads men to make too much of their *own doings*, to the diminution of the glory of free grace; yea, does not well consist with that great gospel doctrine of *justification by faith alone*. [276]

* But this objection is altogether without reason. Which way is it inconsistent with the freeness of God's grace that holy practice should be a sign of God's grace? It is our works being the *price* of God's favor, and not their being a *sign* of it, that is inconsistent with the freeness of that favor. Surely the beggar's looking on the money he has in his hand as a *sign* of the kindness of him who gave it is in no respect inconsistent with the freeness of that kindness. The notion of the freeness of God's grace is not that no holy qualifications or actions in us shall be a fruit, and so a sign of that grace, but that it is not the worthiness of any qualification or action of ours which recommends us to that grace; that kindness is shown to the unworthy; that there is great excellence in the benefit bestowed, and no excellence in the subject, as the price of it. And this is the notion of justification without works, that it is not the worthiness of our works, or any thing in us, which is accepted with God as a *balance* for the guilt of sin or a recommendation of sinners to his acceptance. Thus we are justified only by the righteousness of Christ, and not by our righteousness. And when works are opposed to faith in this affair, and it is said that we are justified by faith and not by works, thereby is meant that it is not the worthiness of our works, or any thing in us, which recommends us to an interest in Christ, but that we have this interest only by faith or by our soul's receiving Christ. But [277] that the worthiness of nothing in us brings us *to* an interest in Christ is no argument that nothing in us is a sign *of* an interest in Christ.

* If the doctrines of free grace and justification by faith alone be inconsistent with the importance of holy practice as a sign of grace, then they are equally inconsistent with the importance of anything whatsoever in us as a sign of grace and holiness, or any of our experiences of religion. For it is as contrary to the doctrines of free grace that any of these should be the righteousness which we are justified by as that holy practice should be so. It is with holy qualifications as it is with holy works. It is inconsistent with the freeness of gospel grace that a title to salvation should be given to men for any of their holy qualifications, as much as that it should be given for the holiness of their work. And yet this does not hinder the importance of these things as evidences of an interest in Christ. Just so it is with respect to holy works. To make light of works, because we be not justified by works, is the same thing in effect as to make light of all religion, all holiness, and all gracious experience. For all is included when the scripture says we are not justified by works. For by works in this case is meant all our own righteousness, holiness, and everything that *is* [278] *in us*, all the good we do, and all the good we are conscious of, and all those holy things wherein the very essence of religion consists, and even faith itself, considered as a part of our holiness. For we are justified by none of these things. And if we were, we should, in a scripture sense, be

justified by works. And therefore if it be not legal to insist on any of these as evidences of an interest in Christ, any more than it is thus to insist upon the importance of holy practice, it would be legal to suppose that holy practice justifies by bringing us to a title to Christ's benefits, as the price of it. But it is not legal to suppose that holy practice justifies the sincerity of a believer, as the proper evidence of it.

So that in what has been said of the importance of holy practice, as the main sign of sincerity, there is nothing legal, nothing derogatory to the freedom of gospel grace, nothing clashing with the gospel doctrine of justification by faith, nothing in the least tending to lessen the glory of the mediator and our dependance on his righteousness, nothing detracting from the glory of God and his mercy, or exalting man. If then any are against such an importance of holy practice, it must be only from a senseless aversion to the letters and sound of the word "works." When there is no reason in the world to be given for it [279] but what could be given with equal force why they should have an aversion to the words "holiness," "godliness," "religion," "experience," and even "faith" itself. For to trust in any of these is as legal, and as inconsistent with the way of the new covenant, as to trust in holy practice.