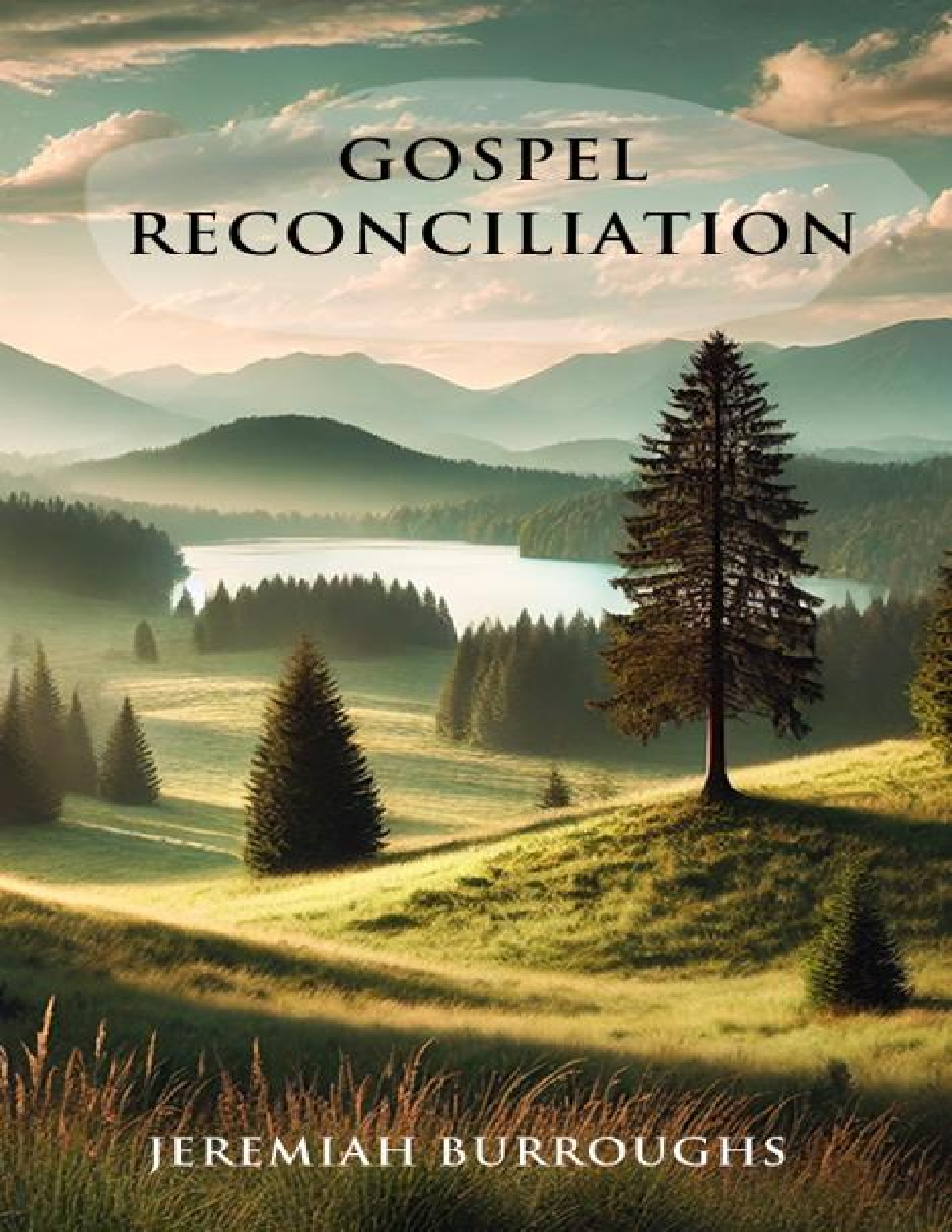
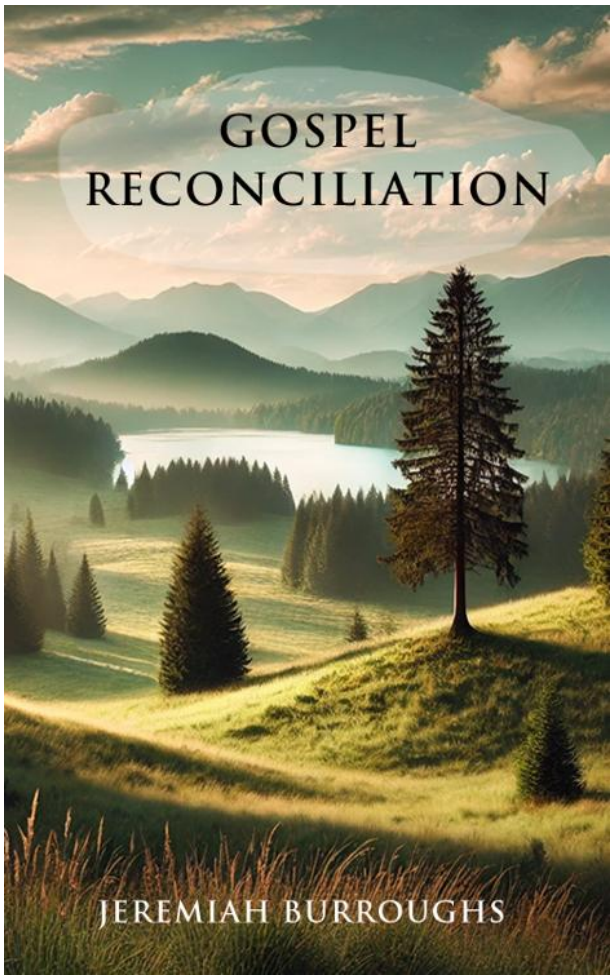

GOSPEL
RECONCILIATION
JEREMIAH BURROUGHS


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Gospel Reconciliation:

Or, Christ's Trumpet of Peace to the World

by Jeremiah Burroughs

Wherein is shown (besides many other Gospel truths):

1. That there was a breach made between God and man.
2. That there is a way to make up this breach.
3. Reconciliation, opened in eight particulars. Twelve blessed consequences thereof. How to know whether a man's peace is made with God. Five helps to make our peace with God.
4. God begins the work of reconciliation with man.
5. Our reconciliation with God is through Christ. How Christ is a fit reconciler. Christ has undertaken, 1. To satisfy God's justice. 2. To bring our hearts and subdue them to God.
6. God's reconciling the [world] to himself.
7. Why God will not himself immediately dispense this Gospel reconciliation.
8. The ministers of the Gospel are ambassadors of Christ. What kind of ministry God speaks most through. How we ought to hear the Word. The horrible wickedness of those who are idle in the ministry.
9. The exceeding willingness of God and Christ to be reconciled to sinners. Sixteen arguments manifesting God's exceeding willingness to be reconciled to sinners.

10. Christ's willingness to be reconciled to sinners, further explained.
11. Objections answered, concerning the exceeding willingness of God and Christ to be reconciled to sinners.

To which are added two sermons.

By **Jeremiah Burroughs**

Published (with a testimony) by:

Thomas Goodwin,
William Bridge,
William Greenhill,
Sydrach Simpson,
Philip Nye,
John Yates,
William Adderley.

London: Printed by Peter Cole, Printer and Bookseller, at the Printing Press in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange. 1657.

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GOD'S PRESENT MERCIES TO HIS PEOPLE ARE ARGUMENTS OF FUTURE MERCIES

OLD AGE IS A Crown of Glory, Especially When Found in Ways OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Chapter 1

> "To wit: that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." - 2 Corinthians 5:19, 20

The Apostle Paul, who was the penman of this and the former epistle, was a chosen vessel to bear the name of Christ in the world; a glorious instrument to publish the grace of God in Jesus Christ. He was one of the most famous ambassadors that ever walked upon the earth, one who honoured Jesus Christ as much as any man we have ever read or heard of. All his care was to magnify, indeed to glorify, Jesus Christ. The very name of Christ was as sweet as sugar in his mouth, and it rolled up and down under his tongue. He himself had tasted deeply of the sweetness of the grace of God in Christ and

laboured earnestly to make this known to others, that they too might experience its sweetness.

In these two verses, as much of the grace of God in the Gospel is set forth as I know of in any two verses together in all the Book of God.

Here, we have presented to us:

1. The doctrine of reconciliation between God and man.
2. The Apostle's commission to declare this doctrine of reconciliation.
3. The faithful discharge of this, his commission.

The first two are found in verse 19, and the third is in verse 20.

Regarding verse 19, we have before us, firstly, the doctrine of reconciliation: to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. Within this, you have two things:

Firstly, the doctrine of reconciliation is stated more generally; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

Secondly, there is an instance given in one special great work of God in reconciling the world unto himself.

We shall make an entrance into the first of these and then proceed; namely, the doctrine of reconciliation set forth more generally: that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

This word, 'Reconciliation,' notes and implies that there was a formal breach between God and us. We cannot understand what it means to be reconciled unless we first understand something about the breach that this reconciliation is to repair. It implies an enmity that existed

between man and God, for if two are to be reconciled, it certainly suggests that there was once an enmity between them. 'Conciliari' means to bring into favour, but 'reconciliari' is to bring back into favour those who were once in favour but between whom a breach has occurred. Thus, to bring back into favour is, in plain terms, reconciliation.

In the unfolding of this doctrine, there are these particulars plainly presented in the text, for I will go no further in the opening of the doctrine of reconciliation but merely address what lies obviously and plainly before us in the words. These are the particulars:

Firstly, that which is implied: namely, that there was a blessed union at the first between God and man. However, this union was broken, and enmity arose between God and man. I put these two together; namely, that after the initial union between God and man, there followed an enmity.

Secondly, there is yet a way for this breach to be repaired; there is a possibility for man, who is at enmity with God, to be reconciled.

Thirdly, we shall explain in what this reconciliation consists—what the reconciliation is that the text speaks of and which the Gospel offers to us.

Fourthly, we shall show the principal cause of this: how this reconciliation began. It was God himself who initiated it with us; we did not begin with him to make peace. God began with us first, or else peace would never have been made between him and man.

Fifthly, we shall show in whom this reconciliation is made; it is in Jesus Christ, which indeed is the principal aspect of all and that in

which the mystery of the Gospel lies. When we reach that point, we shall unfold the mystery of this reconciliation.

Sixthly, we shall discuss from what time this reconciliation has existed. "It was," saith the text, "God was in Christ"; it was not only made at that present moment but there was an eternal work between God and Christ concerning the reconciliation of man.

Seventhly, who are they that are said to be reconciled? That is, the 'world'—to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

Chapter 2:

That There Was a Breach Made Between God and Man After a Blessed Union

In the first chapter, we have much work laid out. Some of the particulars I will pass over very briefly, for my purpose is to unfold the evangelical part of this text and to focus especially on what is plainly expressed, rather than dwelling on what is merely implied. However, since we cannot discuss what is expressed without touching on what is implied, I shall do so briefly before moving on.

1. That which is implied is that there was a breach made between God and us after a union (I put these two together). There was, at first, a blessed union between God and mankind; God created man in a happy state according to His own image, that is, in perfect holiness and righteousness. When He had made all other

> creatures, He fashioned man as His chosen creature, stamping upon him His own image, so that through man, He might receive glory from all the other creatures He had made. He intended that in this world, He would have a creature capable of knowing Him, worshipping Him, serving Him, and recognising the radiance of His glory that emanated from all His other works, and to reflect this glory back upon His face. He made man a creature fit for this work.

Man was very happy in his first creation, in that God made him, of all His creatures, capable of such a task—reflecting His own glory upon Himself, and enjoying communion with God, which no other creature in the world, except the angels in heaven, could do. The Lord loved this creature and took delight in him. It is therefore notable, as seen in Genesis 1:31, that although He declared all His other works to be good, when the sixth day came, wherein man was made, the text states that He saw everything He had made, and behold, it was "very good." Notice that it is never said "very good" until the last day when man was made. There is no such commendation of God's works until He created man; and the reason is that the Lord did not take as much delight in all His other works in this world until He had made man.

Man was the very complement of all the excellencies of God's works; for indeed, he was the end of all His works. God made all other things for man and man for Himself. God does not receive His glory, I mean not immediately, from all the other works in the world, but only through man. Had it not been for man, He would have lost the greatest part of His glory in the rest of His works. His glory passes from all the works He created unto Himself through man. Therefore, although the works that God made—the heavens, the earth, the seas, and the like—were good in themselves, what glory could God have

derived from all these? He could have no communion with these creatures after they were made, nor could these creatures have any communion with Him. None of them could know God, take notice of Him, or actively praise Him.

God is a being of pure action, and He is not content with having His glory in a passive state; He must have His glory actively. It is true that all His creatures were made as an instrument in tune, but there was no one to play upon it. And though there is much of the glory of God in all the creatures of the world, yet if man had not been made, none could have sounded forth this glory of God. These creatures would have been dumb in that respect, like an instrument that cannot, of itself, produce any music unless there is someone to play upon it. And so it is here: God made all other creatures very good, and within them was matter for God's praise. But to ensure that this praise and glory of God might be sounded forth, He created man and gave him the skill to praise the name of God in all these creatures. In this, God delighted very much.

Thus, there was a most blessed union and a wonderful delight between God and man at first. But the truth is, this union was soon broken, and man, in a short time, became (next to the devils) the most deadly enemy that God had. Though there was initially a most blessed union between God and man, so that Adam could walk and converse with God as he did for a while, yet Adam sinned against God and turned into a most desperate enemy, both he himself and all his posterity.

Therefore, you will observe in the story of the fall of man, that as soon as Adam had sinned, the voice of God, which he had once heard in the garden, became terrible to him, and he immediately sought to hide himself. He was conscious that he had made God his enemy,

and he viewed God as his enemy, fleeing from Him as one would from an adversary. Oh, what a change this was in man's condition! What a sad thing that God, who had no other creature in all the world to know Him, fear Him, serve Him, and love Him—and in whom He could delight and have communion—only had man. Yet this man soon turned into a rebel and enemy of God, such an enemy that God regarded him as having a nature most opposed to His own. Likewise, man saw God as his enemy and fled from Him, so much so that God had to call after him, saying, "Adam, where art thou?"

This is the woeful fruit of sin, even of the first sin, of the fall of our first parents. Since the world began, from that very time, Adam has begotten nothing but enemies of God. And if there is any truth in the word of God, it is certain that there was never a child of Adam born who was not an enemy of God. The Scripture is as clear on this point as on any other. I could cite many texts to support this, but for brevity's sake, I will mention just one.

In Romans 5:10, it is stated, "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God." Certainly, if any people in the world were not enemies of God, it would be those who were later reconciled to Him. Yet the Apostle speaks of himself and all other Christians who are reconciled to God, declaring that they were once His enemies. This may be said of every man and woman in the world—that they are enemies of God. Every one of us is, by nature, an enemy to God, with an antipathy towards Him. And the enmity born out of antipathy is the greatest form of enmity; it is not an enmity caused merely by some wrongdoing in one act.

For example, two men, though they were great friends before, may have a falling out and be enemies for a while. But that is not the same as the enmity between man and God, which is rooted in man's very

nature. It is true that a sinful act first caused this breach between God and man, but that is not all. This sin brought about a natural antipathy in the heart of man towards God, an enmity as deep and fundamental as the poison of a toad in the body of a man. There is no greater enmity to human nature than man's nature is to God Himself.

Two sheep may fight one another due to some circumstance and be enemies temporarily, but they can never have an inherent enmity as a wolf has towards a lamb, for their enmity is natural. In the same way, the heart of man is naturally opposed to God. And know this: there exists in man's nature not only a hatred of God but a deadly hatred. You might think you are exempt from this, but certainly, this is in every one of your hearts by nature, even in those who seem to have the best dispositions in the world, as you might call them. There is in their hearts a hatred—indeed, a deadly hatred—against God.

"But," you may say, "God forbid! How can we hate God?" Consider that Scripture in Romans 1, where the Apostle, in speaking of those in their natural condition, says in verse 30 that they were "haters of God." What the Apostle declares there, he means for all people, for his purpose in that passage is to show our natural condition. Therefore, we cannot be justified by any works of our own but must be justified by faith in Christ, because we are by nature haters of God.

In the Second Commandment, this hatred is expressed, even among those who seem to be the greatest lovers of God, who would create images to worship Him and spend much on these, claiming it is for God's honour. Who would not think these people love God exceedingly? Yet, though they appear to be lovers of God, there is no commandment in which the breakers are said to be "haters of God"

except in that one. He will "visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him." That is, those who, despite their pretence of love for Him in their false worship, actually hate Him. Therefore, it is certain that there is a hatred—yes, a deadly hatred—in the heart of man by nature against God.

"But," you may ask, "how does this hatred manifest, or wherein does this deadly hatred of God consist?" It manifests in this way: when one person hates another to the extent that they wish them dead, they wish them out of the way. They wish that person did not exist. Such a kind of hatred exists in every man's heart naturally.

I make this plain: the very nature of God is holiness itself. If God were less holy than He is, He would lose His very being; if God were less just, He would lose His life and cease to exist. Now, I ask you, particularly you who are unconverted, have you not sometimes secretly wished in your hearts that God were not as holy as He is? Could you not wish that God were less just than He is, that He did not hate sin as much as He does? Why would you wish this? Simply because it would grant you more liberty in your sinful ways, allowing you more freedom to indulge the lusts of the flesh.

Is this not present in your hearts at times? Consider what this implies: it is as though you were saying, "My heart is so set upon such a lust that I would rather God cease to be God than I lose my liberty to enjoy that lust." This is its plain meaning, even though you may not express it in such words, for I suppose none of you would be so abominably wicked as to state it outright. But understand that your actions speak a language as well, and God comprehends the language of your actions just as clearly as the words you speak.

It is evident that when a person loves their lusts so much that they secretly wish God were not so infinitely holy and just as He is, they, in effect, desire that God might cease to be. Is this not a deadly hatred? You love your lust so much that you harbour a deadly hatred against God, whose holiness and justice you know are set against it. You wish, in essence, that God would cease to be God, for if He were less holy or just, He would cease to be God.

Indeed, if we truly understood our own natures in this regard, nothing would break a man's heart more than this. What could be more heart-wrenching than to realise, "I have been an enemy of God all my days, and therefore, what can I expect but that God will be an enemy to me eternally?" This is what will bring down the proudest heart in the world. Until you come to see sin in this light, you do not see it rightly.

Though this argument could extend my treatise, because I mention it to prepare the way for what remains—specifically, the doctrine of reconciliation—I shall therefore move on.

Chapter 3:

That There Is a Way to Make Peace Between God and Sinful Man

Would it not now be joyful news to you to hear of a possibility for God to be reconciled to you? You see there is enmity in your hearts towards God; and not only enmity, but a most deadly and desperate one. I could show you many examples of this enmity, but the main

thing I aim to do is to open up the doctrine of reconciliation. Therefore, if you grasp this truth of God and if God has struck it into your conscience, will not the doctrine of reconciliation be acceptable to you? Oh! It would be, and indeed it is, to those who fear God and rightly see themselves as enemies to Him.

But I fear that, while I am speaking of the doctrine of reconciliation between God and you, you might not fully understand its excellence or savour the sweetness of it. Therefore, if I have said anything that seems to be terrible to you in my other treatises—if I have shown you what an evil and dangerous condition you are naturally in, how liable you are to the wrath of God and the torments of hell, where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched—it is all for this purpose: that you might better appreciate the blessed and sweet doctrine of reconciliation between God and your souls.

This, then, is what we shall begin with, as the first sound of the blessed silver trumpet of the Gospel; namely:

Doctrine: That there is a way to make peace between God and sinful man.

God has not left mankind, who has sunk into such a depth of misery, irrecoverable and irreconcilable. The Lord here declares to you that He is willing to be reconciled to you; indeed, as we shall see later, He even entreats you to be reconciled. But here is the first sound of the trumpet of the Gospel, and blessed are they who hear this joyful sound: namely, that there is a possibility of being reconciled, that the Lord is willing to enter into parley with His enemies.

For God could have cast them off forever and never even considered parleying with them, just as He did with the angels that sinned, against whom He was so provoked that He resolved within Himself—

and has kept this resolution since the beginning of the world and will keep it to all eternity—that He will not enter into parley with those creatures or be reconciled to them on any terms. It is as if a man were so estranged from another that, if someone were to come to speak about terms of peace, he could not bear to hear of it. "No," he would say, "I will never enter into a treaty with him as long as I live." In the same way, God will never enter into a treaty with the fallen angels. He will not hear of any terms of reconciliation but is determined to exact His vengeance upon them for all eternity. Therefore, the Apostle says they are reserved in chains for the judgement of the great day.

But now, what shall become of man? Poor man might well fear, upon hearing what God has resolved against the angels, and he has reason enough to tremble at this. For indeed, man is a far poorer, meaner, and more wretched creature than those angels. If it is so between men that, when a great prince is offended with some nobleman in his court—even for his first offence—and all the people in the world cannot persuade that prince to even consider reconciliation, what hope is there for a lesser servant, some poor groom who has also offended the king?

When he hears that the king's chief favourite, one who was always in his presence, has been condemned without hope of reconciliation for a single offence, he would surely think to himself, "What will become of me? Is there any hope that there might be a parley between the king and me?" Certainly, this poor man would be ready to have his heart sink within him and sit down, overwhelmed with fear and despair.

In the same way, we would all have done so upon reasoning within ourselves concerning God's dealings with the fallen angels, had we

not heard this glorious and blessed sound of the Gospel and the hope of reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. Without it, we would have sunk into the bottomless gulf of despair and concluded with certainty that there could be no peace between God and us, given that we are, by nature, such enemies to Him.

But though this truth is beyond our thoughts, as far as heaven is above the earth, and though it could never have entered into the heart of man that God would parley with poor fallen man after such great enmity brought about by sin, know this: this is the message that has come from heaven, even from God Himself—that He is willing to parley with you. Yes, He is so willing that He has sent ambassadors to us to entreat us to be reconciled.

But more on that later. God, I say, is content to enter into a treaty with man concerning a reconciliation and the making up of peace between Himself and their souls; for that indeed is the very scope of the Gospel. If I were to dwell a little on this, to inquire about the reason why the Lord would be willing to enter into this treaty with mankind, the truth is, it is an unsearchable depth. We cannot imagine why the Lord would choose to parley with us and treat concerning terms of peace with us rather than with the angels.

There is something, indeed, that may come to our minds; for example, if God did not reconcile Himself to man and save him, He would lose His entire creation. When the angels fell, He did not lose all of them, but if God did not provide a way to be reconciled to man, the entire human race would be utterly lost. Now, the Lord will not cast away the whole kind of such an excellent creature as man is. But the truth is, these are only guesses as to the reason for His choosing to treat with us about salvation and not with the angels. The main

point is this: God has ways to glorify Himself in reconciling Himself to mankind that we do not know of.

We do know this—that there are glorious intentions that God has in this work, but we shall never fully understand them until we come to Heaven. And indeed, that will be the very work of Heaven itself: to praise God for all eternity for that great act of His, namely, His willingness to be reconciled to lost man rather than to the fallen angels. We shall understand some of the reasons for this in due time, for God does things according to the counsel of His will. There is nothing He does without a great deal of reason, reasons which we must adore even if we cannot fully understand them now.

For the present, let me hint at this: let the consideration of even this much affect your hearts. Oh, if we were sent to preach such a point as this to the devils or to the angels in hell, and say, "The Lord has kept this counsel from you for almost six thousand years, and His ways towards you have been such that it seems He would never parley with you. But now God has revealed His will towards you, that He is content to enter into a treaty with you about the things that concern your peace and the reconciling of you to Himself," what a message would this be to them, do you think? But this has never been, nor ever shall be, preached to them.

If God were to send this message to the damned in hell and say to them, "The Lord is content to enter into a parley with you about reconciling Himself to you," what a message that would be! But this cannot be; this is only a message to those who are alive here in this world. It is only to that part of the children of men who are living upon the earth that this message can be preached—that there is a possibility of reconciliation between God and them.

Truly, the consideration of a possibility is something that may satisfy the heart of man, regardless of what the terms may be. "Oh! Is it possible that God may be reconciled? I will never inquire about the terms out of fear that their hardness should discourage me. Oh! Let the terms be whatever they may, this is the most acceptable news—this is the best tidings to my soul—more acceptable than if I were told that I had been given a thousand worlds. Even this—that I hear there is a possibility of reconciliation between God and myself."

This may serve as a prop to support and keep up any troubled conscience from despair, even in just reading this, though they may still fear God's willingness to make up the peace. But it is possible that you may have it. No angel in Heaven, nor any man in the world, knows or can know otherwise—that it is possible for you, yes, even for you, such a sinner as you are, or someone like you, to come to be reconciled.

And does this begin to stir your heart, just from reading that man's condition is not hopeless, but that there is a possibility of his being reconciled? Do you believe because of this? Then, as Christ said to Nathanael, "Thou shalt see greater things than these." So, if your heart begins to be moved by this, you shall, before we are done with this subject, read even greater things about the counsel of God concerning His willingness to be reconciled to the children of men.

Before I proceed, let me say this one word about this point. Let us take heed that we do not turn this grace of God that we hear of today into something that increases our more fearful condemnation, or make our condemnation far more dreadful than that of the devils, because we have been given more means for our deliverance than they ever had. For if we are not careful, it may indeed prove that our condemnation will be more dreadful than that of the devils.

Therefore, when you hear anything about this doctrine of reconciliation, or the possibility of being reconciled to God, you need to lift up your hearts to God and pray that the reading of this blessed doctrine does not result in the increase of your condemnation. Such a message has never been preached to the devils; therefore, if I do not come in and accept the terms of reconciliation, I shall be in a worse state than the devils. It can never be charged against them that God was willing to be reconciled and they refused, but this may indeed be said of all wicked and ungodly people who live under the sound of the Gospel and continue in their wickedness until they die.

This will be the charge laid against them one day, and God will say to them, "You knew that you were naturally enemies to me; yet I revealed in my Gospel that I was willing to enter into terms of peace with you, but you refused, slighted, and scorned it."

What could possibly provoke the heart of a person more than this: that when he has his enemy, who has deeply offended him, at a disadvantage, he should still offer terms of peace, only for that enemy to walk away scorning, slighting, and despising him? Truly, this is how wicked people behave who live under the light of the Gospel. When the ministers of the Gospel come and preach peace and reconciliation to them, telling them that God is willing to be at peace with them, willing to treat and parley with them about the matter of salvation, they go away, and the language of their actions is this: "Well, we will manage as best we can for ourselves; we are resolved to continue in our ways of sin and to seek satisfaction in this or that lust."

Now, God forbid that this attitude should be found in the heart of anyone who reads this book.

Chapter 4:

Reconciliation Opened

1. By it, God's enmity is taken away.
2. The enmity on the soul's part is taken away.
3. God takes us into His entire love.
4. By it, you come to be in league and covenant with God.
5. The soul is perfectly reconciled.
6. This reconciliation is everlasting.
7. It continues despite all your sins.
8. The devil's accusations shall never make God your enemy again.

Therefore, I come now, in the third place, to further open this grace of God, the doctrine of reconciliation. It is a most blessed and sweet doctrine, especially in these times when there are so many upheavals abroad in the world, and we hear of wars and rumours of wars, even wars near to us, in our very own land, in our innermost parts. What can be more acceptable in such times than to hear of reconciliation?

Now, when matters have escalated to such a height, when there is such a deadly hatred (for let me tell you, there has never been such a deadly hatred in a nation between one party and another as there is now), it has reached the boiling point. Just as poison can be boiled up to such a degree that it becomes deadly to even touch, so the poison and rage of our adversaries have boiled up to the greatest height.

Though we may not be able to conceive that there can be reconciliation between them and us, there is still a possibility of

reconciliation between God and us. The hearing of the doctrine of reconciliation can quiet and support our hearts against the fear and trouble that we face in these times, where we are surrounded by rumours of wars, even in the midst of the turmoil that we hear of, as the effects of these unnatural conflicts that are among us.

Now, this doctrine can be opened up in these several particulars:

The first is this: that enmity, which we have spoken of before—when God comes to be reconciled to a soul—is completely taken away. All that enmity is removed so that the ways of the Lord towards a person are entirely changed from what they have formerly been, which I shall discuss more fully when we consider the effects of this reconciliation. But this is the first point: the doing away of all the wrath and displeasure that was in the heart of God against the sinner.

If it were possible for you to look into the heart of God, you would not see any trace of that wrath and displeasure that once existed because of sin. It is true that if we consider all of God's works together, from election to glorification, it would be difficult to affirm that God was ever in a state of enmity against His elect, because He has always loved them. The truth is that while we conceive of God's works in separate parts, they are all one in Him.

However, if we are to understand God correctly, we must understand Him in relation to His creatures and in relation to Himself. For, as God exists in Himself, it is impossible for us to fully comprehend Him. Instead, we must understand Him in reference to His creatures, where we find that one aspect of God's excellence is revealed in various pieces and parts. And that one act of God, which is His own being, is made manifest in several ways of acting.

There are many mistakes about God when men draw conclusions from what God is in Himself to determine what God is in relation to His creature. Because they cannot reconcile these two—namely, what God is infinitely in Himself (which is beyond our comprehension) and what God is in His manifestation to the creature—they end up drawing most absurd and vile conclusions about God. Sometimes they look upon God as He is in Himself, and sometimes as He is to the creature, and, being unable to distinguish, they misunderstand the ways of God exceedingly.

For example, if you consider God as He is in Himself, there are not two attributes in His essence. What we call mercy and what we call justice is one and the same in God. What we call love and what we call hatred are all one in God, but in us, they are two distinct things. In man, justice is one thing, power is another, patience is another, and love is yet another. But in God, all these are but one infinite essence.

Similarly, regarding actions, sometimes we conceive of God acting in one way and then another—first in the way of His wrath, and then in the way of His love. However, God Himself is one pure act. When we look upon God in Himself, we can see Him only as absolutely one in His own nature; there are no such attributes as we speak of. These distinctions are only according to man's capacity and the various ways of the manifestation of God's infinite essence and actions.

But when we look upon God in reference to the creature, we see God as it were divided. For example, when the sun shines, and its beams appear, if you place a green, blue, or red glass between your eye and it, then the reflection will appear blue, green, or red according to the colour of the glass. Yet, in the meantime, the beams of the sun remain unchanged. If you change that blue glass to green, the light of

the sun will appear green too. All the variety is in the glass, not in the sun.

In the same way, God is the same forever, but according to the different conditions men are in, so are God's workings toward that creature. Consider this: man in the state of innocence was like a clear, white glass, and God shined upon him in a way of goodness and love. When that same man falls and is stained red by sin, if he is now presented to God, then God's ways towards him appear as wrathful, like blood. But when this man is converted to God, the glass is changed, and God represents Himself in another way, yet He remains the same God. It is only according to the various conditions of the creature that His actions differ.

Therefore, those who try to speak of God as He is in Himself, who is but one pure act, are prone to lead you into a multitude of errors because they cannot handle their understanding of Him in His essence. Consequently, they draw wrong conclusions about God. They might argue that God is unchangeable and ask how you can be under God's wrath when He has loved you from all eternity.

Yes, the same God who can look upon the creature in one consideration with love may look upon the same creature in another consideration with hatred. "We were by nature children of wrath, even as others," says the Apostle. In that respect, there was no difference between us and others.

Consider this: was there not a time when Jesus Christ was under God's wrath? Yet God loved His Son from all eternity; He always loved Him. However, there was a time when Christ was under the wrath of God. That is, when Christ was presented to God with our nature and with our sins, God's ways towards Him were, as we might say, in a "red" manner. In this way, we can understand that even

those who are elect, whom God has loved from all eternity, may still be in a state of enmity with God, as He works upon the creature according to its different conditions. Thus, while someone is walking contrary to God, God is also walking contrary to him.

So now you see what this reconciliation is. This enmity is taken away. That is, whereas before God shone upon them through a red reflection, now that is removed, and He shines upon them through a white glass. This dreadful wrath of His that was against them and that opposition of God's ways against them is entirely taken away. This is the first point.

Secondly, the second aspect of reconciliation is this: not only is the enmity in God removed, but the Lord also takes away the enmity on the soul's part. That is, through this reconciliation, you come to be so overpowered by the Spirit of God that you develop a heart in harmony with God. At the very least, that natural stubbornness and perverseness of your heart against God, by which you hate Him and what is holy and spiritual, is taken away. You receive a spirit that is mouldable, framed by God, and made willing to come in, submit, and yield yourself to Him. God gives you a spirit inclined to reconciliation, just as He Himself has a reconciliatory spirit toward you.

Thirdly, further, in the third place: there is a receiving into entire love. It’s not just that God's wrath and enmity against you cease, nor is it merely that the enmity within you against God is removed; rather, there is a receiving into complete love, and this love is mutual. God receives you into the love of a friend, and you receive God into the love of a friend as well. There has never been such an entire friendship between two friends, even after peace has been made between them, as there now is between God and your soul.

This is more than merely being pacified. Men who were previously enemies may have their fierce enmity subdued, and they may be reconciled to the extent that they will no longer harm one another, no longer fight as they once did. Yet, for all that, they may never come to love one another entirely and may live as strangers to each other. However, when the soul is reconciled to God, it is a thorough reconciliation. The enmity is not only taken away, but there is an entire love between God and the soul. You are made a friend to God, and God becomes a friend to you.

Fourthly, in the fourth place, there is this in reconciliation as well: you come to be in a league with God. God and you come to shake hands with one another—indeed, more than just shaking hands—you become one of His own people. God takes you into an everlasting covenant with Himself, and you take Him to be your God in an everlasting covenant likewise.

Just as when princes are at war with one another, there may be peace made, and they may lay down their reasons on both sides, but even then, they might not enter into a league of friendship and amity. However, God is so reconciled to a soul that He enters into a league with it, establishing a covenant.

Fifthly, when the Lord is reconciled to a soul, He is perfectly reconciled. We may use that word here, for the truth is, this reconciliation is so perfect that not the slightest grudge remains in the heart of God toward a person who is reconciled. It's true that on our side, it may not be as perfect, but on God's side, the reconciliation is so complete that there is not the smallest grudge left in God's heart against the creature that would lead to any harm.

Sixthly, yes, such is the reconciliation that it is everlasting. It is a reconciliation where there shall never be another breach, such a

reconciliation where there will never be any falling out again. When was there ever such peace made between one man and another? When has anyone ever been reconciled to another, who was once at deadly enmity, in such a way that one could say, "They are so reconciled that there will never be any breach between them again"? They are so reconciled that nothing that can ever be done in the world will break the bond of friendship that exists between them.

This is true reconciliation, and this is the reconciliation that exists between God and every believing soul from the very first moment you come to Jesus Christ. God shakes hands with you, enters into a league with you, becomes a friend to you, and is so reconciled to you that nothing in the world will ever break the atonement made between God and your soul.

You shall see how God Himself expresses it in Isaiah 54:10, speaking to His Church about this very matter of reconciliation: "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." This scripture, though spoken to the Church, is true of every believing soul. Do you think that mountains are firm? Many storms and tempests may rage, but all the storms in the world cannot remove the mountains.

“Look,” says God, “at how firm and steady the mountains are; so firm shall my mercy be to you, and the covenant of my peace.” If God has had mercy upon your soul and has reconciled Himself to you, then know that this reconciliation is more stable and firm than the mountains themselves. Oh! This is the fulfilment, the pinnacle of reconciliation—that it is a perpetual reconciliation.

So that, even though some of God's ways may seem to you as though He is an enemy, even though He may sometimes appear to be against

you, there is peace for you. God intends no harm at all. However He may sometimes seem like an enemy, He means you no harm. All the afflictions that befall you do not come from God as from an enemy, although, perhaps through your weakness, you might think so. For even though God is reconciled to you in such a gracious way, if He corrects you, you may be inclined to see Him as an enemy. But no, this is your mistake. God's reconciliation is a complete reconciliation, and it is compatible with all the corrections He may use toward you.

7. Yes, this reconciliation will remain constant, despite all those sins of yours which, by their very nature, create breaches between God and man. Take heed not to abuse such a doctrine as this. Your sins cannot overcome God's goodness; oh, let God's goodness overcome your wickedness. For it is certain that the Lord, when He first reconciled Himself to you, knew that there would be many failings and disagreements, as it were. Yet, He was resolved to be reconciled, and that this reconciliation should continue despite all those failings.

Your sins, though they may change some aspects of God's dealings with you, so that He may severely correct you, will not take away this reconciliation. The Lord will remain your friend still. However, if you are truly reconciled, God will instill in your heart the desire that when there is any failing in you, you will never be at peace until you come again to renew your peace with Him. You may lose the sense of your peace, but you will never lose your peace indeed.

And though we cannot speak such a truth as this without fear and trembling—because it may contribute to the hardening of many souls—yet God is so willing that His people should be comforted that He will have this doctrine of reconciliation published, even if it results in the damnation of many sinners.

8. Yes, the accusations of the devil against you shall never provoke God to turn into an enemy to you again. There may be peace made between friend and friend, but sometimes there are whisperers, tale-bearers, and troublemakers, driven by a spirit of jealousy, who can intervene and cause much harm through their suggestions. But this cannot occur between God and us.

It is true that the devil would continually act as a troublemaker between God and your soul, and he constantly goes before God to accuse the soul—hence, he is called the "Accuser of the Brethren." However, the peace that is established between God and a soul through His Son is so firm, and the friendship so stable, that the Lord shuts His ears to all the accusations that can be made against His friends.

A true friend cannot bear to hear anything bad about another. It is a sign that friendship is beginning to grow cold when someone is willing to listen to any evil spoken against their friend. The Lord will not listen to the least accusation made by Satan against His friend; He will not even be willing to hear anything spoken against His people. Such a perfect, thorough, and firm peace is there between the soul and God.

Chapter 5:

Twelve Blessed Consequences of Our Reconciliation

But now, what I especially intended was to show you some consequences of this peace. In doing so, I would have demonstrated the excellency of reconciliation. I will present the particulars very briefly.

The First Consequence

Firstly, from this reconciliation follows peace with all the creatures in the world. Whereas before, not only was God an enemy, but all the creatures were also enemies: the good creatures, the ill creatures, even your companions whom you considered friends; the heavens, the earth, the beasts in the field, the stones in your house—all were your enemies. Not the least creature in the world was exempt from being part of the host of God, ready and poised to avenge God's quarrel against you.

You are afraid of soldiers—why have you not all this time been afraid of the host of Almighty God? God has enough soldiers, even in your own house, which He can raise up against you. He can command the very dog in your household to tear out your throat if He once gives it a commission. There is an enmity between every creature and a sinful soul, and it must be so. If there is enmity against the general and commander-in-chief of an army, then there must naturally be enmity against the soldiers as well. You, as a sinful soul, walk up and down in the midst of God's host, who are ready at every moment to destroy you, waiting only for a commission from God, the Lord of Hosts, to avenge His quarrel upon you.

But now, once reconciled to God, all this host—all of creation—is reconciled to you. All the good creatures, including the angels, are now for your benefit. Before, they stood ready, waiting for a commission from God to strike you down, for the angels wait for God's command to act against those who offend Him. When they

receive such a command, they swiftly put it into execution. But now, being reconciled, these angels have become ministering spirits to you.

It is a great matter to have the angels reconciled, and by being at peace with God, they too become reconciled with you. Instead of being your enemies, they now serve as many fair chariots to guard you from whatever may harm you. The same can be said of all evil creatures as well—they are all so far reconciled to you that they shall do you no harm or injury.

The Second Consequence

Secondly, a second fruit that follows is peace of conscience. Whereas before, your conscience terrified you, struck fear and dread in your heart, and continually accused you before God, acting as God's officer to fill your soul with poisoned arrows, tearing you apart, now, being at peace with God, your conscience is at peace too.

As it says in Romans 5:1, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ," and then follow those most sweet and comforting effects, which we will discuss further. But this is the fruit of reconciliation—peace of conscience, which is worth ten thousand worlds. To have one's conscience as an enemy, to have it constantly terrify, is a greater judgment than to have all the wild beasts in the world come to tear and rend one’s flesh.

The Third Consequence

Thirdly, there is peace within all the faculties of the soul. Consider this: before reconciliation between God and man was achieved, the Scripture says, "There is no peace for the wicked," referring to the tumultuous workings of many lusts within their hearts, with one

constantly fighting against the other. The conscience tells one thing, while a man's will opposes the conscience, and the affections are all in turmoil against one another. One lust opposes and fights against another, leading to disorder, confusion, and tumult in the heart of a wicked person. He goes against the light, and the light goes against him, resulting in nothing but conflict and unrest in his heart.

The Apostle says, "Your lusts war one against another within you," and you can easily observe this in yourselves: when your lusts rise up, they create such a woeful disturbance in your heart that you are like the sea, which casts up nothing but mire and dirt. Take a wicked person who experiences even a brief glimmer of light, revealing to him the mind of God; his heart fights against this light, and the light fights against his heart, resulting in nothing but woeful disturbances within his soul. He is never at peace, even when he seems to be at his most serene and quiet.

But now, when we are at peace with God, a blessed calm enters a person's spirit. The conscience, the will, and the affections are brought into a sweet and harmonious order, and things are, to a great extent, more peaceful than they ever were before.

The Fourth Consequence

Fourthly, the fourth fruit is joy in the Holy Spirit. When God is at peace with a soul, the Holy Spirit comes and sheds abroad the love of God. It is true that we are not always aware of this joy, but once we know that we are reconciled to God, we begin to feel the joy of the Holy Spirit spreading through our hearts.

This is seen in Romans 5, where, having peace with God, "we rejoice in tribulation." And more explicitly in Romans 14:17, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the

Holy Spirit." Joy in the Holy Spirit follows our peace, or our reconciliation with God. That is the fourth point.

The Fifth Consequence

Fifthly, another fruit of reconciliation is that the soul gains free access into God's presence with boldness. Indeed, when I see God as my enemy, and myself as an enemy to God, how can I approach His presence with confidence? But, being reconciled, I now have access to God.

Adam could not stand in God's presence once he had broken his peace with God. However, with our peace made through Jesus Christ, we may enter into the presence of God and comfortably behold His face, seeing no hatred or vengeful wrath in it.

The Sixth Consequence

Sixthly, hence, there may be a sweet and blessed trade between Heaven and Earth, between God and the reconciled soul. Just as countries that are at war with one another cannot engage in any trade or commerce, once a league and peace are established, trade becomes open.

So it is between God and the soul. The truth is, there is no free trade between Heaven and us until peace is made. We cannot trade with Heaven or receive its blessings; we may speak to Heaven, cry out, and say our prayers, but to actually receive the rich treasures that are found there, we must first have peace concluded. Indeed, a gracious heart reconciled to God never sends up a prayer without expecting a return, much like a wealthy man sending a ship to the Indies. However, it is far better, for you may lose your ship and the investment you send may fail, but when a gracious soul trades with

God and sends his ship of prayer to Heaven, he never fails to receive a sweet and rich return.

The Seventh Consequence

Seventhly, now, we come to enjoy all the good we have in this world with a new right. It is settled upon us and comes to us under a new account, a new right, and thus, it is far more comforting than before. Previously, we had forfeited all that we had because we had taken up arms against God. You know that once arms are taken up, that very act leads to the immediate forfeiture of one's estate.

Similarly, by taking up arms against the God of Heaven, we forfeited all our comforts and enjoyments, and we have reason to wonder that God has not sent some arrest upon our estates and seized all that we have. But now, with peace made between God and us, all is restored again. Therefore, those who are reconciled to God may enjoy comfort in what they possess. They may look upon their houses, their trade, their food, and their drink as all being the fruits of their peace with God.

The Eighth Consequence

Eightly, hence follows the protection of God over us and all that we have, allowing us to enjoy everything securely. I do not claim that God will never allow the adversary to take away our goods—He may do so if He sees that it serves our good—but certainly, we are under God's protection, and not a single hair will fall from our heads without God's permission. The enemy cannot take away even a hair or the smallest token without God's commission, for we are under His protection. You will not lose even a farthing unless, if you knew all, you would be willing to lose it.

You might ask, "Would anyone be willing to be plundered?" Truly, if you understood how God's wisdom works in such matters and how it accomplishes His purpose and brings Him glory, if you loved God, you would willingly give up yourself and your possessions to Him. You would say, "It is better for me to give up all that I have when it may be for the glory of God, even though I cannot see the specific way, than to continue holding onto it." Therefore, the saints of God lose nothing except what is taken away by God's authority, from a God who remains their friend. We do not fully grasp the vastness of God's love if we do not believe that His love can coexist with such actions as taking away some of our possessions. God's love is so immense that it can encompass a thousand such instances. All these troubles and afflictions, when absorbed into the infinite sea of God's love, make no alteration in it.

The Ninth Consequence

Ninthly, through this reconciliation with God, you and God come to have common friends and common enemies. When God enters into a league with you, and you are reconciled to Him, God says, "From now on, all your enemies shall be My enemies, and all your friends shall be My friends." And the same will be true for you: you will regard all of God's enemies as your enemies, and all of His friends as your friends.

The Tenth Consequence

Tenthly, now you come to be in as good a condition as you were before any sin was committed in the world. We were at peace with God in Adam, and that peace was broken. I do not say that what we have now is peace as properly as it is reconciliation; it is the recovery of peace. And you, being received into this peace, are in as good a

condition, in as happy a state, as Adam was in his innocence—yes, even happier.

For although there was peace between God and Adam then, there was also the possibility for Adam to turn into an enemy of God. But it is not so with you now; therefore, you are safer. God's heart is as much toward you as it ever was toward Adam, indeed, even more so, for you are now in a better covenant—the covenant of grace. Though this is no thanks to sin, God has so ordered and transformed it, just as they say of a broken bone that, if it is well set, becomes stronger than it was before.

So too, when the heart is truly set and aligned in this reconciliation with God, it is more firm with God and in a better condition than it was before the breach was made. This is something that can bring great joy to a person's heart. When someone has been at odds with a powerful person, one who holds his life and all he possesses at his disposal, how joyful it is when someone comes to reconcile them, and not only reconciles them but brings them into an even better state of friendship, where the powerful man becomes a surer friend than ever before.

Well, Christians, rejoice together in this blessed goodness of God, in this happy reconciliation that Christ has brought between God and man.

The Eleventh Consequence

Eleventhly through our peace with God, we are freed from the effects of any wrath or judgments that God may execute in the world. No aspect of that wrath shall befall us in a revenging way, as it does with wicked and ungodly people. We shall certainly be delivered from all its evils.

When judgments are sent from Heaven upon the world, there is protection for all who are reconciled to God. Though darkness may cover the world, there is light in their hearts. They always dwell in Goshen, even when God is most terrible in His judgments to others. This terror of God is removed from them.

If you were to hear the noise of trumpets and drums, the neighing of horses, the roaring of cannons, and the firing of muskets—all the dreadful sounds of war—you might be initially struck with fear and terror. But when you come to know that it all comes from your friend, it takes away the terror of all these things.

Imagine a man approaching a house where there are a pack of fierce mastiff dogs barking as if they would tear out his throat. He might naturally feel some fear, but if the master of the house is his friend and stands by, he need not fear any harm from them. Indeed, if the man were an enemy or a thief coming to steal and destroy, then he might rightly fear these dogs.

So too, the troubles of the world may approach with open mouths, as if they would devour us, but if we are God's friends and He stands by us, we need not fear what they can do to us. We have a "quietus est" (a release or protection) from God against all the evils in the world. Though the destroying angel may come, if the blood of Christ—who is our peace—is sprinkled upon the doorposts of our hearts, that angel will pass over us.

This is another fruit of our peace with God: protection from His wrath when it spreads abroad like lightning in the world.

The Twelfth Consequence

Twelfthly, again, all that is in God's word now speaks peace to us, both the Law and the Gospel. Even the Law itself now speaks peace to us because it is fully satisfied. There is nothing in the word of God that is not at peace with those who are at peace with Him. The threats found in the word of God bring no harm to the one who is reconciled to God. Every part of God's word benefits those who walk uprightly, as stated in Micah 2:7: "Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?"

When you read any part of the word of God, no matter how severe or fearsome it may seem, if you are reconciled to God, you may read it with comfort. Many people hesitate to read certain parts of God's word, and some scarcely dare to listen to parts of it. But if you are at peace with God, you need not fear reading or hearing any part of His word.

Why is it that many people avoid sermons that contain any hint of terror? No matter what their excuses may be, it is a sign that there is guilt in their hearts. They view the word of God as if it were their enemy, and it is a sad thing for a person to regard any part of God's word as an enemy. If any part of God's word is your enemy, then God Himself is your enemy, for every part of His word contains His mind and heart. Therefore, if you are at peace with God, there is nothing in His word that stands against you.

Indeed, a man on the sea, if storms and tempests arise, may be afraid to look out or dare not leave his cabin. But if he is on solid ground, he can stand and look upon all the waves of the sea and all their boisterousness without any trouble. Similarly, when people are in their natural condition and not converted to God, they tremble when they hear the terrors of the Law. They cannot consider the wrath of God, which the Law threatens and which they feel is deserved

because of their sin. Their very hearts quake, and they shut their eyes against these truths.

However, when they are once on the shore—when peace is made between God and them—they can look upon all the terrors of the Law and all the wrath it threatens with joy and comfort, blessing the name of God forever for their freedom and deliverance from them.

These are the blessed and happy fruits of our peace and reconciliation with God. Now, before we proceed any further, we must pause and reflect on what has been opened up to you thus far concerning the excellencies and glorious fruits of this peace and reconciliation.

Chapter 6

Use 1

Therefore, in the first place, from this, it must necessarily follow that if there is such a blessed peace between God and a true Christian as has been explained, then that person must be very peaceable in the world. He must be of a very peaceable disposition before others.

You may ask, "How does this follow?" It is because there is so much sweetness in this peace with God that it naturally quiets the spirit of the person in whom it resides, so that whatever external troubles

may arise, they will never be able to cause a great disturbance in his spirit. Such is the greatness and excellence of this peace.

A merchant who has all his wealth in one vessel is anxious with every stirring of the winds or every report of a storm, fearing that everything may be lost. But if he hears that the ship is safe and has come securely into the harbour, his spirit, which was once fearful, will now be so calmed and satisfied with this news that it will not be easy to anger him.

There is nothing more capable of keeping a person's heart from anger, stubbornness, and disturbance than a complete satisfaction within one's own spirit. Now, if there is anything in the world that can satisfy a person's spirit, surely it is peace with God—it is the reconciliation that exists between a person and God.

The Scripture says that a good man shall be satisfied from within himself (Proverbs 14:14). Even if he encounters difficulties with those around him, there is so much within him that satisfies and quiets his spirit. Therefore, a Christian does not need to rely on the world for peace, for he has enough peace within his own heart.

The greatest jewel in the world is fully possessed by the Christian in his own heart. All the storms and tempests in the world cannot cause an earthquake unless there are vapours within to create it. In the same way, the things that shake people’s hearts and cause turmoil in their spirits are often more due to inward disturbances than to external circumstances. We may complain about outward matters and blame different situations, but the truth is, if we examine ourselves and search for the true source of our disquiet, we will find that it is more from within than from without. If all were well within, we would never be troubled by anything that happens outside us.

If anything in the world can bring about complete calm within, if anything can create serenity and peace in the spirit of a person, it is reconciliation with God. No wonder then that the Gospel speaks so often of the peaceable disposition of those who accept it, telling us of the wolf dwelling with the lamb and the lion eating straw with the ox. This means that although people were once of fierce and aggressive natures, after receiving the Gospel and accepting the terms of reconciliation with God, they become like lambs and live in harmony with one another.

The reason for this change is that there is so much peace in the Gospel that it quiets the heart. One might marvel when considering the excellence of the peace between God and a person, wondering how it is even possible for a Christian to be easily angered.

You complain about the troubles you encounter in your life—that your husband is difficult, or that your wife is unyielding, or that you have challenging neighbours—but if God is at peace with you, and if He is not harsh towards you, should your spirit be disturbed by such things when you are at peace with God? Is there not enough in this peace to overcome all these disturbances?

I have often observed that it is a frequent complaint about those regarded as godly that, while they may be good people, they are also very quick-tempered and difficult. Truly, this is an extreme blemish upon those who profess the faith. And if we consider it carefully, one would think that nothing should be more contrary to the spirit of a Christian than being quick-tempered and harsh. Nothing should be more opposite to true grace, for when grace comes, when faith in Christ is present, it brings such an abundance of peace to our hearts that quick-temperedness and harshness should be entirely incompatible with this reconciliation, true grace, and faith in Christ.

When people are of such a nature that they are easily angered and, once angry, are unwilling to be reconciled, it is a dangerous sign that there may not be true peace between God and their souls, as they claim. And certainly, this is the reason why many Christians are as quick-tempered as they are—they do not maintain their peace with God. There is often some breach in their peace with God, which makes them so harsh and irritable with others.

To demonstrate that the more our peace with God is broken, the more irritable our spirits become, consider the example of Saul. When Saul first came to the throne, he seemed to have a very humble and gentle spirit. He regarded his family as the least among the tribes and himself as the least in that family. And when some worthless people spoke against him, saying, "Shall this man be our king?" the Scripture tells us that he held his peace. Later, when others suggested that those who had opposed him be put to death, Saul said, "No, no man shall be put to death this day."

At first, Saul displayed a quiet and meek spirit, but after he had departed from God, and God had departed from him, he became very harsh, irritable, and rugged. He who had once been peaceable and gentle towards his enemies became harsh even towards his own son, Jonathan, who was a good, gracious, and godly son, a son of a sweet nature. To him, Saul said harshly, "You son of a perverse woman," and he would have killed him in his anger had the people not intervened.

Similarly, when Saul was merely thwarted in his plans and heard that the priests had helped David, he commanded that they all be killed—men, women, and children—and eighty-five priests of the Lord who wore a linen ephod were all murdered. Such was Saul's harsh,

irritable, and rugged nature. And what was the reason for this? It was because he had departed from God, and God had departed from him.

Therefore, those of you who are quick-tempered and harsh have reason to examine your own hearts and consider whether this is not the root cause—that you have broken your peace with God. Now, being at peace with no one—not with your husband, wife, or neighbours—if you were to stay close to God and maintain the sweetness of your heart in the enjoyment of peace with Him, it would not be easy for you to be disturbed by anything that happens to you from outside.

This is the first thing that follows from the sweetness of our reconciliation with God: a gracious heart that understands this must naturally have a sweet, loving, and meek disposition towards others.

Chapter 7

Use 2

Secondly, oh, the blessed state of a believer—of one who has embraced the Gospel! He is reconciled to God; he is at peace with God, and that carries with it a great deal, as you have heard. The Jews were accustomed to express all kinds of prosperity and happiness with this word: "Peace." "Peace be to you," they would say, and in saying so, they wished every manner of good, for indeed, the word is a comprehensive one.

Therefore, God regards it as His glory to be called the "God of Peace," and the Son of God finds His glory in being the "Prince of Peace." The Spirit of God, too, is glorified in that the fruits of the Spirit are joy and peace. It is the honour of the Gospel to be the "Gospel of Peace," and the glory of the Kingdom of God to consist of righteousness and peace. It is the Evangelical benediction: "Grace and peace." It is the glory of the Covenant of Life to be a Covenant of Peace.

Peace is a most amiable thing. But peace with God—how lovely, amiable, and glorious it is! Ask a wounded conscience that understands and feels the enmity that sin has placed between itself and God, what it would give for peace with God. Ask a dying man who understands what God is, someone who has no peace with God —what would he give for that peace?

If you could possibly ask those damned spirits now in Hell what they think of peace with God, oh, what a commendation they would place on this peace! Well, may we be willing to endure some trouble in seeking after this peace with God. Well, may we be content to lie under the stroke of the Law as long as God wills, for this peace will eventually make up for all. Those who have endured the greatest terrors of the Law, when the Lord has come in with manifestations of this peace and reconciliation to them in Jesus Christ, have thought themselves well compensated. If it were necessary to endure a thousand times more than they have done, they would consider all to be worth it for this blessed peace.

This is truly a blessing in these troublesome times, in which we hear of nothing but wars and rumours of wars. We are taught by what we now hear, feel, and know to value outward peace. But if we think

outward peace is such a great mercy, what then is this reconciliation and peace with God, the soul's blessing?

Yes, you will say, there is indeed a great deal of blessing in this reconciliation with God that we have read about, and happy is the soul that is at peace with Him. But how shall we know that we are among those who are reconciled to God, so that we may enjoy those blessed fruits of reconciliation that are discussed here?

I admit, this is worth knowing and worth searching after. It is a good sign if your heart is sincerely eager to know how matters stand between God and your soul. This is something that does not often occupy people's thoughts, and perhaps there are many who, in all the days of their lives, have never seriously considered how things stand between God and their soul.

You go about in the world, busying yourself with this and that. But oh, my soul, how do things stand between God and you? Are all things well there? Are all things at peace there? Does God have anything against you? Does God have dreadful things to charge you with?

Yes, you will say, "God has enough to charge upon us all." No, but if you are at peace with God in Christ, God has nothing to charge you with. And it is possible to be in such a condition that you know God has nothing to charge against you, so that you can stand before the Lord, free from anything He might accuse you of. This could further demonstrate the excellence of our peace with God.

It is true, none can be in such a condition without having enough sin within themselves to be charged if God were to look upon them in themselves. And often, those who are most self-aware of their sins are the ones God has the least to charge against. In themselves, I

affirm, God has enough against them, but looking upon them in Jesus Christ, He has nothing to charge them with—nothing that would make them stand guilty in His presence or answerable to His Law, which they have broken.

You might ask, "How then can God afflict us for sin?" Yes, there is no such conclusion that because one has nothing to answer to the Law, they are exempt from affliction. For those who are reconciled to God, afflictions are not products of the Law but are God's ways of dispensing His wisdom to His people. He believes that afflictions are a suitable way to demonstrate to themselves and to the world that He is a holy God and that He is displeased with sin. God works upon them in such a way, but not to provide satisfaction to divine justice—that is not God's purpose in afflicting them.

There is a great difference between fatherly displeasure and revenging displeasure. In this reconciliation, God has swallowed up all the displeasure of a judge, all His revenging displeasure, and He has done so eternally. However, there may still remain the other—the fatherly displeasure. God has not swallowed up His fatherly displeasure but retains it, and that without any detriment to Himself, all of it tending to the good of those upon whom He manifests such displeasure.

Chapter 8

How to Know Whether a Man's Peace is Made with God, Opened in Seven Particulars

1. Every weapon of war against God is laid down.
2. There have been treaties of peace between God and that soul.
3. Peace with God will make you abhor yourself for your former cursed ways.
4. It will make you be on God's side.
5. It will preserve you from evil.
6. It will enable you to suffer much.
7. It will make you highly value it.

But I say, the soul should often inquire how things stand between God and itself. Are the terms right between God and my soul? Am I at peace with Him, or am I not? If not, how can I sleep? How can I go about my business while God is an enemy to me? And if I do go about my business, it is a sign of a bold and presumptuous heart to walk merrily and quietly, without ever determining this great question: how do things stand between God and my soul?

Would you then know whether the terms are indeed good, right, and peaceable between God and you?

1

Firstly, be assured that unless you have laid down all your weapons of war and enmity against God, you are not yet at peace with Him. Can you, in the sincerity of your heart, appeal to God and say, "Lord, you know that there is no weapon of enmity against you in my heart that I have ever been aware of, but I have been willing, and I shall be willing, to lay it down. God forbid that there should ever be even the smallest weapon of war found in my heart against You"?

Every known sin within you is a weapon of warfare against God. And though you may lay down many, if there remains even one

unrepentant sin, that one sin is enough to create an eternal breach and enmity between God and your soul.

Now, do not be at ease, do not rest in your own spirit; do not sleep peacefully tonight unless you can bring your heart to this point: that you can go in secret before God and say, "O Lord, You know I have renounced all the ways of sin that You have ever revealed to me. Though my sins cling to me as closely as skin to my flesh, as soon as I become aware of them, as soon as You reveal them to me, I cry out and protest against them."

Consider, for example, in a time of war, if some people enter your house and, at first, you do not know who they are. But later, by their actions, behaviour, and speech, you realise that they are enemies. Now, if after recognising them, you welcome them, care for them, entertain them, and give them money, or other valuables, you would be considered an enemy to the state. But if, as soon as you identify them, you ask them to leave and do all you can to drive them out, and if they are too strong for you, you call upon your neighbours or the authorities for help, asking them to assist in removing them, then you cannot be charged with being an enemy to the state. Why? Because, although they are in your house, it is entirely against your will.

Similarly, many people entertain their corruptions, cherish them, and fulfil their lusts, thinking they can excuse themselves by saying, "What can I do? I can't help it." But do you truly complain about it? Do you cry out to God, saying, "Lord, here is an enemy—an enemy to You as well as to myself, an enemy to Your glory as well as to my own soul. Oh, that You would come in and cast this enemy of mine and Yours out of my heart! I cannot sleep peacefully; I cannot rest or be

at ease as long as this enemy remains within me until You come and cast it out"?

This is a sign that you are at peace with God if you have laid down your weapons of warfare against Him and are at enmity with every sin. If you harbour no known sin within your heart, even if it is very secret, this is the most evident sign that can exist. Even the weakest Christian may be able to apply this to himself and come to know something about this peace with God.

2

Secondly, if you would know whether God and you are reconciled, let me ask you this: What treaties have there been between God and your soul? You must understand that, although there may indeed be peace made between God and you in some manner from eternity (as I shall explain later), before it comes into your heart—before you can come to know it—there must be a treaty between God and you.

The reconciliation from eternity comes from treaties between God the Father and God the Son. But the reconciliation that occurs in time and enters your conscience is the result of some treaty that has taken place between God and yourself.

For example, when God desires to be at peace with a soul, He summons that soul to come in. He reveals that it is an enemy to Him and that it is walking in ways contrary to Him. Just as enemies approaching a town will first issue a summons before storming it, so too the Lord summons you to come in.

When did God ever summon your heart? Have you felt the power of God's summons in your soul?

And then, have you felt much interaction between God and your soul? Has God been speaking to your heart, and has your heart been speaking to God? Has God been working towards you, and has your heart been working towards God? Has the Lord sent messages to you through His word, and have you sent prayers up to Him? As the Lord waits to hear your answer when He speaks to you, do you also wait for His answer when you pray?

What treaties have taken place secretly in your private moments between God and your soul? Do you attend church and hear God's word without ever truly hearing His voice? Or, when you come to hear God's word, do you hear His voice treating with you about matters of peace? Do you feel God's Spirit drawing your heart and revealing His mind to you?

Perhaps, even while you are listening, you send up a silent prayer, saying, "Lord, I am willing to accept these terms of peace and reconciliation; I am willing to accept the conditions of the covenant." Or, if not during the hearing, perhaps when you are alone, you open up to God more fully and send a complete answer to Him.

This is the way of treating—when you come to hear God's word offering terms of peace, and requiring certain terms, you, while listening, silently respond with, "Lord, I accept the terms," and when you are alone, you send up a full answer. Then, how do you bless His name that He was ever pleased to offer such terms to you, even if they were a thousand times harder?

Has there ever been such a process in your heart? Has it been one of the most significant undertakings your heart has ever engaged in? Has your heart been more focused on this treaty with God about peace than on anything else that has ever concerned you in your life?

If so, it is a good sign that you are in the way of peace, and if your conscience confirms this, it will be a truly comforting assurance.

However, the truth is, I cannot give you the complete and thorough evidence that will fully satisfy your heart until I address the next point—to show you how the heart is brought to Christ and reconciled to God in Him. But I hope this helps guide your soul in that direction.

3

Thirdly, the third sign is this: If you are at peace with God, then when God is pacified towards you, and you become aware of it, it will cause you to reflect on your former wretched dealings with God. It will leave you feeling deeply ashamed in your own thoughts and cause you to abhor yourself for your past, cursed behaviour and opposition towards Him.

I will give you an excellent scripture for this: It is in Ezekiel 16:63, where it says, "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth anymore; because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done."

This, then, is the time when the soul becomes ashamed of its wretched dealings with God and is confounded by the thought of them—even when the Lord is pacified towards it for all the evil it has done.

Take this to heart (when you set this book aside and find yourself alone): One might think that the appropriate time to be ashamed and confounded would be when God reveals His wrath towards a soul. But no, it is when God says, "When I am pacified towards you," that you will be confounded and never open your mouth again.

So, if you have any clear evidence in your soul that the Lord is pacified towards you for all the evil you have done against Him, it will cause you to look back on your former actions and be deeply ashamed. You will find that, regardless of what God does to you, you will never open your mouth again but remain ashamed of all your wicked dealings with Him.

Many of your consciences may tell you that you have acted in various horrible ways against the Lord. What sins have many of you lived in? Do you hope that God is reconciled to you and pacified towards you for all those terrible things you have done? If He is, then you will, in response to this grace of God towards you, reflect on your past actions and be confounded in your soul. The more you sense your peace with God, the more you will be ashamed and troubled by what you have done.

Many a wretched sinner, when faced with the fear of death, will feel ashamed of what he has done, and he will complain, cry out to others, and ask them to pray for him. But that is not what God speaks of here. For if God were to set such a one on his feet again and free him from sickness and fear, he would no longer feel ashamed but would return to his merry ways.

But if God is truly pacified towards your soul, then you will be confounded and ashamed for all the evils you have committed against Him. This is as comforting an argument that peace is made between God and us, and that He is reconciled to us, as any I know. When, upon realising this peace and reconciliation, we become confounded in our own souls.

4

Fourthly, one who is at peace with God will always be on God's side. He will go wherever God's cause leads, and he will be willing, no matter how dangerous it may be, to take risks on God's side. Such a person, by a secret instinct from God Himself, is able to discern and distinguish God's side and is not as full of doubts as others are. Once reconciled to God and in friendship with Him, he will always remain on that side.

Many will say, "If we knew which was God's side, we would be on it." Friends, the reason you find it so difficult to identify and discern God's side is that you are not friends with God. If God were your friend, His secrets would be made known to you. Test yourself now: wherever you are, if there is any opposition to God, even if only a few stand up for Him and His cause, you will be sure to join those who stand for God, even if they are the fewest or the humblest in the town where you live. This is a true sign that you are someone who is at peace with God.

5

Fifthly, if you are at peace with God, this peace has great power to preserve you from evil. As stated in Philippians 4:7, "The peace of God shall keep your hearts," the text says it will guard your heart, just as a house is guarded by a troop of horsemen or a band of soldiers. If temptations arise, the peace of God will guard your heart and keep you in a gracious state. It will be a mighty force to protect your soul from evil. I do not know a stronger defence against the evil of sin than the peace of God made known to the soul.

6

Again, if you are at peace with God, this peace will enable you to endure much in God's cause. Ephesians 6:15 speaks of "being shod

with the preparation of the gospel of peace." That is, the peace that the Gospel brings will enable you to tread upon sharp stones, for that is the meaning of the phrase. In those regions, people would wear sandals on their feet, as walking barefoot on sharp stones would be painful and harmful. So, the Apostle says, you may encounter rough and sharp paths in your Christian journey, but the peace that the Gospel brings will be like shoes, enabling you to walk upon those sharp stones. Does the peace of God enable you to endure much for Him? If so, it is a sign that you are at peace with Him.

7

Lastly, one who is at peace with God sets a mighty high value on that peace; he will not easily part with it or lose it. It is the bird in the bosom that he desires to keep singing. As long as he can keep that bird singing in his heart, he considers himself well enough, even if he faces countless difficulties and hardships in the ways of God.

A person who has obtained this peace with God knows how to treasure it, for, ordinarily, it is obtained with a great deal of difficulty —it cost them something, and it cost Jesus Christ something before they could gain it. Have you found peace with God? If it is genuine, know that it cost you dearly, and it cost Jesus Christ dearly, and surely, now that you have it, it will be equally dear to your soul.

So, if sin should present itself to you and try to draw your heart away from God toward evil, this will be your very thought (even if there may be pleasure and profit in the path that sin offers): "Will this not hinder my peace with God?" If there is even the slightest suspicion that it might, the soul will say, "Away with it! I will not buy the pleasure or profit of sin at such a dear price."

The soul says to sin, as the fig tree and olive tree said to the other trees when they were invited to rule over them: "Shall I lose my sweetness," said the fig tree, "and my fatness," said the olive tree, "to come and be king over you?" In the same way, a heart reconciled to God asks when sin and the world present themselves: "Shall I lose my sweetness and my fatness? Shall I lose that blessed peace that exists between God and me to join with you?" O, God forbid! Surely, I will never buy the sweetness of sin at such a costly rate.

Indeed, those in the world who have a false peace will risk that peace for any trivial reason. If a man possesses a jewel that is merely a false jewel—something like a Bristol stone, worth perhaps no more than a couple of pence—he will not be overly careful with it. But if he has a true diamond or a genuine pearl, he will not risk it over a trifling matter.

The peace that most people have is a counterfeit, false peace, and they will quickly risk it on any terms. Those who so readily yield to the temptations of sin provide clear evidence that their peace is false; that is why they can part with it under such easy conditions. However, the soul that has true peace with God views it as a jewel of inestimable value, as a precious pearl. "Here lies my happiness," says the soul. "You shall not take this away from me lightly, with trivial matters. I will not part with something so precious, which cost me so dearly, and which cost Jesus Christ Himself so dearly—no less than His own blood."

Most people in the world think they have peace with God, but let me ask: What did your peace cost you? It cost little, and so, lightly come, lightly go. That is why so many professing believers walk so carelessly in their ways; the peace they have came easily to them, and so it goes away just as easily. They have patched together a false

peace, but they have not understood the true mystery of the soul's reconciliation to God, and that is why their behaviour is so loose and undisciplined.

Thus, I have endeavoured to help you examine whether your peace is genuine or not. If, according to these signs, you can conclude that your peace is true, then blessed are you! Go your way rejoicing and join with the angels in their song: "Glory be to God in heaven, and peace on earth." Glory be to the great God who is on high, who has not only made peace on earth but has made peace within my heart. Therefore, O my soul, return to your rest.

Your soul can now truly take its ease. There is a remarkable expression concerning this in Psalm 25:12, where, speaking of the happiness of the godly, it says, "What man is he that feareth the Lord? His soul shall dwell at ease." O! It is a blessed thing to have a soul that dwells at ease. You would be eager to have comfortable dwellings for your bodies where you can live at ease, undisturbed or untroubled, whether by bad neighbours or the fear of enemies. O! But to have your soul dwell at ease, that is your true happiness.

Therefore, even though in many parts of the nation our brothers abroad may have no houses in which they can live at ease but are always in great straits and dangers, if this peace with God is made certain for you, then even if you were in the midst of your enemies, your soul could come to dwell at ease. Remember this verse, therefore—it is a blessed and sweet promise, and you should cherish it, especially in such troubling times as these: "He that fears the Lord, his soul shall dwell at ease."

Chapter 9

Use 3: To seek to make our peace with God: five helps towards it

1. Keep from the outward acts of sin.
2. Labour to set God continually before you.
3. Resolve not to be at peace with yourselves until you are at peace with God.
4. Seek peace with God on His own terms.
5. Value peace with God now as you will value it on the Day of Judgment.

To conclude this particular aspect of the excellency of our reconciliation with God, there is yet another application we may draw from it, and that is this:

Use 3

If it is of such great value to be at peace with God, O that you would all desire it, that you would all seek to make your peace with Him, who is the great Reconciler.

You may ask, "Can we make our peace with God?"

No, you cannot do it entirely on your own, but it is, to a large extent, prepared for you if you only have hearts to seek after it. It is true, there is another point (but that will be addressed later) to show how it is already offered to some. But for now, you must understand that you can have no clear evidence of this peace within your own conscience until you earnestly seek after it. Indeed, if we truly understood either the necessity of this peace or the excellence of possessing it, we would never find rest in anything until we are assured it belongs to us.

You may ask, "What shall we do?"

I answer: although we know that it is primarily the great work of Christ to make our peace with God, God nevertheless requires that we actively pursue it. And in requiring this, if you belong to Him, He will impart some secret influence of His grace to enable you to achieve it. He will give you a heart to labour for it, which is, in fact, one sign that you are on the path to peace.

Help 1

Therefore, let me urge you to do what you can. For the present, refrain from the outward acts of sin; do not willfully yield to either inward or outward acts of sin. Strive to bring your heart to this state so that you can say, "The Lord knows I do not willfully give in to any known sin." Convince your heart, fully impress upon yourself, that this is the great work you have to accomplish in this world. This is the one thing that is necessary for your soul, and you will find that even this will be a powerful aid in helping you move forward.

Help 2

Again, labour to set God continually before you—His greatness, majesty, power, and goodness. Strive to keep these ever in view, so as to draw your heart towards seeking peace with God.

There is an excellent scripture in Isaiah 27:5, which is somewhat difficult to understand, but it is very sweet if rightly interpreted: "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me." It is a peculiar phrase, and I find much variation among interpreters regarding this text. I find that Mr Calvin, who usually gets it right as much as most, renders it in the form of a question: "Will he take hold of my strength, that he may

make peace with me?" As if it were saying, "What will he do? Will he wait until he becomes aware of my power and strength, and only then decide to make peace with me?"

This is how many people behave—they wait until God makes them aware of His power and strength, and only then do they seek to make peace with Him. However, I can hardly think this to be the intent. Yet it is a valuable meditation to consider God's power, strength, and glory, and to reflect thus: "O, if the Lord were to come now and make me aware of His power and strength, it would certainly stir my heart to seek peace with Him."

Why do we often hear the cries and shrieks of souls who suddenly realise God's power and strength? It is because they finally grasp the reality of the mighty God they are dealing with. The truth is, people do not make it their priority to seek reconciliation and peace with God because they fail to comprehend His power, majesty, and glory—how God is above them, capable of humbling them and making them lowly whenever He pleases.

Therefore, it is a good interpretation to consider: "Will he take hold or grasp my strength, that he may make peace with me?" But I believe the meaning is rather this: "Will he instead make use of my goodness and mercy, and so make peace with me?" For that is the strength referred to here, as I shall show you from the context.

Firstly, let me tell you that in Scripture, 'strength' often signifies God's goodness and mercy—His power to do good as well as His power to bring about judgment. I will give you a few scriptures to support this. In Numbers 14:17: "And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression," and in verse 19: "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity

of this people, according to the greatness of thy mercy." When Moses pleaded with God for peace between Him and His people, he appealed to God's power: "O Lord," said he, "according to the greatness of thy power, or according to the greatness of thy strength (for they are the same), do this."

Similarly, in Psalm 27: "The Lord is the strength of my life," where God's power and strength are terms used to express His ways toward David. Here, the word signifies a strength that supports something weak—just as a vine, being frail, would collapse if left on its own. Thus, you place props under your vines, which have more strength than the vine itself, to keep it upright. That is precisely the word in the original text translated as "strength," as if God were saying, "Will he take hold of me, as one would take hold of a prop?"

The context of the words supports this meaning, for the prophet in that chapter was speaking of God's goodness to His vineyard. Verse 2 reads: "In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it; I will keep it night and day." What a sweet promise this is from God to His Church!

There may be many enemies who are strong, swift, and ready to shed blood, but take note: in one verse, you read three times "I," "I," "I," says God. "I oppose myself to all the enemies of my Church: I do keep it, I will water it every moment, I will keep it." But what will become of it at night? "I will keep it," says He, "night and day." We have here a promise that allows us to sleep peacefully.

He continues in verse 4, "Fury is not in me; though it is true, I may come against you in such a way that you might think I am provoked, but," says He, "fury is not in me; I am not provoked in a vengeful manner toward my people. Who would set the briars and thorns

against me in battle? There is a group of wicked and ungodly men who may set themselves against me like briars and thorns. But," says He, "I will go through them if they come in my way, I will consume them, I will burn them together. But my people—they are my vineyard, and I will deal gently with them. I will be a prop and support to them."

Then He continues with this: "Let them take hold of my strength, that they may make peace with me." As if to say, "You are poor, weak creatures; you are indeed my vineyard, and my vine, but you are frail, and when a storm comes, you are ready to bow down and lie flat on the ground. Yes, but," says God, "although you may think my wrath is abroad in the world, my power and my wrath are against my enemies. All my power and strength are for you; they are no different from the prop set under a vine in a storm to prevent it from being beaten to the ground. My power shall support you."

"You should," says He, "take hold of this my strength, just as the vine clasps around the prop, and so make peace with me."

This is an excellent scripture to encourage you, especially in these dangerous times, to be sure to make peace with God. You who are godly and have some hope that God is at peace with you might be troubled with fears of danger. Know that God sets His power and strength beneath you, and He invites you: "Take hold of my strength," says He, "just as the vine takes hold of the prop. By renewing your act of faith in my power and goodness, you will renew your peace with me. Whatever fury is abroad to burn the briars and thorns, you shall have peace with me, and my power that destroys them will be a prop to uphold you."

Thus, this scripture not only illuminates what I said earlier but also urges you to labour and endeavour to make your peace with God in

troubling times. Set, therefore, before your eyes the power of God and the greatness of God—that is one interpretation. Then set before your eyes the goodness and mercy of God, so that your heart may come and entwine itself around this God, just as the vine wraps around the prop or the hop around the pole.

Help 3

In your efforts to make peace with God, observe this rule: resolve within your own heart that you will never be at peace with yourself until you are at peace with God. Do not allow yourself any peace within your own heart until you have obtained true peace with God. I am not saying that you should refuse peace with others, but I do say, resolve never to be at peace with yourself. It is a noble struggle when a person contends with their own sinful heart. Ask yourself, "Shall I be at peace with this wretched heart that is an enemy to God? God forbid! This heart of mine must be brought low and be at peace with God before I will be at peace with it."

Many souls are destroyed because they are so indulgent with their own hearts, unwilling to confront them. The truth is, many continue in ways of enmity against God because they are reluctant to quarrel with their own hearts. We should be willing to let our hearts be troubled all our days if it means laying and securing the foundation of our peace and tranquillity.

Help 4

Another way to make peace is this: come before God with a rope around your neck and sackcloth upon your loins, casting yourself down before the Lord, and beseech Him to set His own terms. Surrender your heart to God as though it were a blank slate, and pray

for Him to inscribe His conditions upon it, only that He may be at peace with you.

If you do this sincerely, manifest its truth in your life. If you are later tempted to sin or face a duty you find difficult, reflect on the state of your heart. Think to yourself: "Wasn't there a time when I sought to make my peace with God? Didn't I once cast myself before the Lord and offer Him my heart as a blank for Him to write His terms upon? Now God requires this duty of me, and I am hesitant to do it. Oh, I am not living as I promised when I sought peace." When facing temptation, remind yourself: "This is so contrary to what I vowed to God when I surrendered my heart to Him."

I put this to you: have you ever entered God's presence, as a humble soul, and surrendered your heart to Him as a blank for Him to inscribe His terms upon? If not, you are not at peace with God, and you can be certain that you have not addressed this most important work, which concerns you infinitely more than even your breathing.

You might say, "I hope I have done this; I have been in my closet, offering my heart as a blank to God for Him to write His terms, and I have vowed to accept any conditions."

If so, examine the course of your life to see whether your actions align with such a commitment.

You should do this at every fast, for every fast is meant either to make peace or to renew peace. A day of atonement involves coming before the Lord and surrendering yourself to Him. At the end of such a day of fasting, enter into a covenant with God, giving your heart to Him as a blank for Him to inscribe as He pleases. Either this must be done, or you are taking God's name in vain. If you do this sincerely,

use it as a guide whenever temptation arises and say to yourself: "Is this consistent with someone who has given their heart to God?"

Help 5

Oh, that we could value and perceive now what this peace will mean to us on the day of judgment, when the glorious appearance of the great God will be revealed! You think this peace will be of great worth then; strive to make it just as precious to your heart now. Realise its worth today, just as you will on that day.

This is surely why there are not more souls earnestly pursuing peace with God—because they do not grasp its true value for the future. There is a precious scripture in 2 Peter 3:14: "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace."

Do you not believe that there will one day be a manifestation of the glorious God in a way far beyond anything we have ever witnessed in this world? Do you not expect such things? If you do, you will undoubtedly long to be at peace with God. Seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of Him in peace. Let this be the most important matter that occupies your heart—that you may be found of Him in peace.

Woe to you if you are found to be an enemy of God on that day; what will become of you if you are not found in peace? It would have been better for you never to have been born.

But how are you to be found in peace? Consider what follows: "without spot and blameless." This is the way to be at peace with God. But you might say, "O Lord, if this is required to be found in

peace—that we should be without spot and blameless—then we are lost, for who can be found without spot and blameless before God?"

Yet you see, this is the word of God, and it is truth. It stands as a certain truth: whoever is to be found in peace with God at His glorious appearing must be without spot and blameless. If God finds even one blemish upon you, He will proceed against you as an enemy.

But you ask, how can this be? First, in Christ, the soul stands before the Lord without spot, clear in the matter of justification. Likewise, from an evangelical perspective, it may be considered so in God's eyes, for God refers to the uprightness of a person's heart as perfection in other scriptures: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," and "Let us perfect holiness in the fear of God." God views it this way because He pardons all in Christ and accepts believers in Christ, presenting them before Him spotless and blameless. Moreover, He grants them a heart that strives to cleanse away their imperfections and walk blamelessly before Him and others.

This is the way to make peace with God. Oh, that the reading of this book might serve to reconcile some soul to God who was once His enemy. Oh, that this scripture might find fulfilment in the hearts of some souls! Thus, although I have addressed this matter of reconciliation only briefly, I have endeavoured to open up its meaning, its excellencies, and its blessed fruits.

Chapter 10.

God Begins the Work of Reconciliation with Man

Now, the thing which I thought to have finished in this chapter (but shall not until the following chapter) is this: that God is beforehand with His people in reconciling Himself; He begins the work. "To wit," saith the text, "that God was in Christ reconciling the world," etc. It is God who begins the work of reconciliation, and if God did not begin it, certainly we would never be reconciled to Him. It is God who first has any thoughts about reconciliation, and if He had not done so, we would never have thought of it ourselves but would have continued as desperate enemies to Him all our lives.

Secondly, it is God who finds the way of reconciliation. We could never have conceived of a way, or if we had, we could never have discovered it.

Thirdly, it is God who begins to offer terms of reconciliation; we would never approach God unless He came to us, such is the stubbornness of our hearts.

Fourthly, it is God who must not only come once but again and again; after we have refused, God must begin again. Indeed, among men, when an inferior has offended one who is above him, the superior will say, "Let him come to me, if he will." But God does not stand on such terms. God does not say, "Let man come to me first." No, says God, "I will go to him." A man, if he be the superior, will say, "I will never trouble my thoughts about it; it must come from him first." But God does not say so. His thoughts have been towards us from eternity; the Lord from eternity has had thoughts of peace towards us, and He has found ways for it, and He comes first to offer it.

But someone who is offended with another might say, "I have been willing to go as far as to come to him and offer him peace, but I will never do it again; if there is ever to be any reconciliation between us, I assure you, he shall come to me next time." God does not say this to us. We would be undone if He did. If God were to come once and offer peace to us, and upon our refusal, stood on such terms as men do and said, "Well, I have offered peace once; but now they must begin next, or there will be no peace between us," where would we be? No, says God; though I have offered it once, and it has been refused, I will offer it again.

Help 5

Yea further, God is often the first to yield to His poor creature. Perhaps a man might be persuaded to send to such a person a second time; but when they are in discussion together (if one is superior to the other), they will stand on this: who shall yield first? And it will be difficult to bring the superior to yield. But God is not so. When we come to treat with God about our peace and reconciliation with Him, though our hearts resist, yet God yields first.

For this, you have a notable text in Romans 5:10: "If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God." This phrase clearly indicates that God is first willing to yield on His part. This is the infinite grace and goodness of God towards man—to begin with man in the matter of reconciliation.

Chapter 11.

Uses of God's Beginning with Man to Be Reconciled

Use 1: Admire His goodness in beginning, seeing He had no need of us and had such great advantage against us.
Use 2: Begin to seek peace even with our inferiors.
Use 3: The certainty of our salvation being reconciled.
Use 4: Not to be backward and hang off when God calls to duty.

A fourth particular propounded at the beginning of this treatise in the first chapter is this: that God begins first with man to be reconciled to Him. In this great work of making peace, it is God who initiates it. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." In this part of the verse, there are these four things further to be addressed:

First, that God begins the work.
Secondly, that it is in Christ.
Thirdly, that God was doing this, even from eternity.
And **lastly**, that the subject of this is the world.

There was a word or two hinted at regarding the first of these in the last chapter. It is God who begins the work of our reconciliation; and if He had not begun, we would never have had thoughts of it. We would never have known how to go about reconciling ourselves to Him, and even if we could have known how to do it, our stubborn and hardened hearts would never have yielded to God. It is God who must begin the work.

And He does not only begin with us, but indeed He continues as well. Although He has begun, if He does not continue—and after our rejecting being reconciled to Him the first, second, third, and fourth time; if He did not again and again take the initiative—we would never come to be reconciled to Him.

I will only provide two or three observations by way of application, having already addressed this matter somewhat; and so, I shall proceed further.

Use 1

First, let us learn to admire the goodness of God to wretched man, His goodness that He should be pleased to begin this work of reconciliation with us. For consider the infinite distance that is between God and us. Oh! infinite goodness, that so great a God should begin with such a poor, vile creature as man is. Among men, if one is but a little inferior to another, and if he has fallen out with someone beneath him, he takes it as a matter of scorn to begin making peace. "No," says he, "let him come to me and seek me if he will." If God had stood upon such terms, all the children of men would have been damned eternally.

When God saw that we would perish forever, and that we would never even think of being reconciled to Him, oh, then the bowels of His compassion yearned towards us; and He said, "I will begin with them first, for I see they will not begin." Indeed, they began to make the breach; they began to sin against Me. And that will be a second consideration which makes the grace of God even more marvellous, that the breach is made on man's part: that all the wrong done is on man's part. Among men, if one is great, though he himself has done the wrong, he expects his inferior to come and bow before him. But if his inferior began the quarrel and did the wrong, he will surely stand firm and expect his inferior to seek reconciliation with him. But here, behold, though we began the quarrel, though we did all the wrong and God never did us any, yet so infinitely gracious is the Lord that He begins first. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

Yea, further, the Lord has no need of us. Among men, if one falls out with another, he may perhaps say, "Well, I see I shall have use of this man; I shall have need of him for this or that business, or for such and such employment." And upon this account, though he be his inferior (for superiors may have need of their inferiors), he is willing to be reconciled to him. But God has no such need of us. God knows how to glorify His own name, even if we all perish eternally. It is not for any use that God has of us that He comes to begin the work of reconciliation with us.

Moreover, God has us at an infinite advantage to do with us as He pleases. Indeed, a man may be willing to be reconciled with his enemy because he sees it will cost him much to maintain his position against him; it will put him to much trouble. But there is no such reason between God and us, for God has us under His feet. For a man who has his enemy under his feet, and has him at every advantage, to then sue for reconciliation—one would say it is a rare thing, and where is there such a thing in the world? But behold, God does this with us. Though He has us at infinite advantage to do with us whatsoever He pleases, and can draw out His glory even from our ruin and eternal misery, yet He begins the work of reconciliation with us. Oh! admire the infinite grace of God toward wretched and sinful man. This will be the work of the angels in heaven for all eternity—to admire God's rich grace, even in this one branch of the Gospel: His beginning the work of reconciliation.

Use 2

Another use of this may be to teach us not to think it beneath us to begin seeking peace even with our inferiors. Let us learn by the example of God that if there be a falling out between one neighbour and another, or between one friend and another, not to think it

undignified to begin the work of peace. We often think it would be a dishonour for us to yield so far. We say, "Is he not my inferior? Shall I send to him?" But why, it is God's glory to do it! God does not only do it to us, but He counts it His glory to do so.

It is a great part of the glory of God that He is willing to yield to us and to send to us about terms of reconciliation. And shall that which makes God glorious be considered a dishonour to you? Shall it make you inglorious, when it makes God glorious? If it be an excellency in God, surely it is no baseness, no dishonour in you. What a proud heart you must have to think that something which elevates God should diminish you! As if your honour were to be higher than the honour of God Himself! Certainly, those men who are of such implacable dispositions, who will never yield to begin making peace with others but will stand firm to the uttermost, even when their consciences tell them they have done much wrong, and who could be willing there was peace, only they will not begin—this proud and stubborn spirit in men is evidence that they have not experienced God’s reconciling work in themselves. For God's beginning to be reconciled to you will incline you to begin reconciliation with your inferior.

You may say, "Why should he not begin first?" It is true; why should he not? It is his duty indeed, and so it is our duty to begin with God. But suppose he does not begin; you should rather pity him and consider him to be in a more miserable condition. And know that though you have the advantage over him, you are still to be like unto God in this matter.

USE 3

Thirdly, a third use of God's beginning the work of reconciliation with us is the use that the Apostle himself makes in Romans 5:10: "If

when we were enemies to God we were reconciled unto Him by the death of His Son, how much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Here you see the Apostle's inference upon God's graciousness in Himself: He, being willing to be reconciled when we were enemies, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved. As if he had said, "Considering all the goodness of God towards poor, wretched, sinful creatures, when we were desperate enemies to Him and never thought of coming in to be reconciled, yet the Lord Himself finds out a way and begins the work of making peace between Him and our souls. Surely then, being reconciled unto Him, we shall be saved."

What! Shall God, when we were going on in a desperate way of enmity against Him, come to us then and have thoughts of peace, love, and mercy toward us? Surely when we are reconciled, when we have hearts in some measure to love this God, and to serve and fear Him, He will not cast us off. Certainly not; it is better with us now than before. When we were enemies to Him, and desperate enemies at that, it would have been no wonder if God had cast us off and sent us to our own place to lie forever under the infinite burden of His wrath. But the Lord had thoughts of peace toward us then. It is therefore now far otherwise with us. Though it is true we have many corruptions in us, we can appeal to God that our souls love Him, and that the desire of our hearts is to fear and serve Him.

We can, in some measure, say: "Lord, You who know all things, know that there is nothing in the world our souls desire more than to overcome these corruptions. There is no burden in all the world like the burden of sin. There is nothing so grievous to us as this: that we have such vile hearts and natures that we cannot serve You better than we do. And if God were to ask us what we would have from Him, we could say, in the sincerity of our souls: 'Lord, You know we

would not ask for riches or honours, to be kings and princes in the world; but, oh, that we might be delivered from the remainder of the corruption that is in our hearts, from such and such distempers of our souls whereby we dishonour Your name continually.'"

Certainly, if the hearts of men are in this disposition, they may draw a comforting argument for themselves and conclude thus: "There was a time when I went on as a desperate enemy to God. I lived without God in the world and never acknowledged His power, majesty, or dominion over me. As if I were born for nothing else but to sin against God, I followed my own lusts with all manner of greediness. But behold, even at that time, the Lord had thoughts of mercy toward me, and He took me—perhaps when I came to hear the word with the intention to scorn and despise it, even to mock it. Yet, at that very time, He took me, spoke to my heart, and showed me Jesus Christ and His mercy, and then He broke my heart. Now the Lord knows, though I do not profit as I should when I come to His word, yet I come with a heart desiring to profit, and I earnestly wish to know the mind of God in it. Before I come, I go to God and ask Him to show me some part of His will."

"Will God now cast me off, when, being a desperate enemy to Him, He had thoughts of mercy towards me? Will He cast me off for the infirmities I have now? I know I do not have a heart opposed to that grace, though my heart is full of distempers. I am not an enemy to God as I was before, nor an enemy to His people and ordinances. No, my heart is toward Him, toward His people, and toward His ordinances. And was God reconciled to me then, even whilst I was an enemy? Will He now cast me off for weaknesses and infirmities? Certainly, it cannot be." Oh, make much of that place of the Apostle: "If when we were enemies unto God we were reconciled unto Him; much more," says he, "certainly now God will not cast us off, but we

shall be saved." That is the third use we may make of God's beginning the work of reconciliation.

USE 4

Fourthly, was God beginning with us, and did He begin with us? Then let us not be backward with God. Let us not hang back in any duty when God calls us to do it, but come in promptly. Let it not be long before we perform any duty. Let us not stand off or defer with God, saying, "I will, and I will later." Certainly, the soul that comes to understand the goodness of God, how He began with us in making peace before we even had thoughts of it, will find this to be a mighty argument that prompts the soul to hasten to do any duty which God calls for and to be speedy in the service of God because He was pleased to begin first.

But we pass from considering God's beginning to be reconciled unto us and move to that which is indeed the main point in this matter of reconciliation in the text, and even the principal of all the doctrines that are in the Gospel: namely, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

Chapter 12.

Doctrine: Our Reconciliation with God is made in Christ. Seven Points for Expounding the Doctrine.

You have read much about the blessedness of reconciliation and what a happy condition it is to be at peace with God, especially in

these times of war and trouble when there is so little peace in the land. And you have read that God begins the work. But how does He do it? Observe: it is not God merely considered as the Creator of Heaven and Earth, that infinite first being of all things. Rather (the first point proposed in the first chapter to be explained is this), it is God *in Christ* reconciling Himself to the world.

God and man were enemies; there was enmity and a breach, and that breach was infinitely wide and dreadful. How shall God and man now come to be reconciled? You might say, "The Lord is a God of infinite mercy, and He sees His poor creatures must inevitably perish eternally if He takes advantage against them. Therefore, perhaps God was willing to pass by all, and so, by His own free grace, be reconciled to such creatures as have sinned against Him, and thus reconciliation was made." No, this was not the way; more is required than this.

Let God and the creature be considered together without any further factor, with all the mercy of God on one side and all the cries, tears, and repentances of the creature on the other. This alone will never establish peace. You must understand this is the doctrine of the Gospel: that man, having made a breach between God and himself, and considering God merely in Himself, as He is in His essence, without relation to a Mediator, even with all the mercy of God on one side and all the tears, repentance, cries, and prayers of the creature on the other, both together can never make peace.

What more, then, must there be, you ask? It is what we find in the text: God *in Christ* reconciling the world. It is not God in Himself reconciling the world to Himself, but it is God in Christ. Therefore, something must come between God and us concerning reconciliation, or else peace can never be made.

This is a subject I have often had the occasion to discuss, and I am very willing to set this truth before those to whom I preach whenever possible, for this is the great truth of the Gospel. Truly, all our preaching should aim to bring this truth home to the hearts of people, and whatever we preach, if it is not oriented toward this, we waste our labour. God gains little glory from what we do unless it is in connection to this or as a result of it.

So, the point is this…

Doctrine: Our Reconciliation with God is made in Christ.

As we read of Jonah, when the storms and tempests were in the sea, and when the waves roared, and the ship and the mariners were all about to be swallowed up, once Jonah was cast into the sea, there was suddenly a calm. So it is with the storms and tempests of God's everlasting wrath against a sinner. The waves of that wrath are ready to swallow him up. But when Christ is cast into the heart of a man, and Christ stands as one between God and man, everything becomes calm.

When the disciples were upon the sea, and the sea was turbulent, yet when Christ came and rebuked the sea and the winds, all was still. Similarly, when there are troubles of conscience, nothing can rebuke those troubles; nothing can bring peace and quiet to the soul except Christ coming into the heart. It is God *in Christ* reconciling the world to Himself.

There is nothing more evident in Scripture than this: that it is God in Christ who reconciles the world to Himself. This truth is clear enough from the text, but I will provide a few other Scriptures to support this point before proceeding further.

Consider Romans 5:1, which is most clear: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." How? "Through our Lord Jesus Christ." There is no peace with God but through our Lord Jesus Christ. It may seem an easy matter for us to say so, but to grasp the necessity of this—that it *must be* through our Lord Jesus Christ that we have peace with God—and to apprehend this clearly and thoroughly is a profound matter. Those who know this experimentally and powerfully truly understand much of the mind of God.

In Ephesians 2:13-14, it says: "In Jesus Christ, you who were once far off have been brought near through His blood, for He is our peace." This is spoken in two regards. Firstly, He is our peace with God, as is clear in verse 18: "Through Him, we have access to the Father." Secondly, it refers to Christ being our peace in uniting us to the Church of God, making us one with God's people. The partition wall is broken down through Christ, and those who were once considered as dogs are now seated at the table.

Through Christ, a reconciliation with God is established, and there is unity with the people of God, His Church. Christ makes peace by removing enmity so that the people of God might be one together, just as they are one with God.

We also see this in Colossians 1:21-22: "You, who were once alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled." How? "In the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, blameless, and above reproach in His sight." And verse 20 is especially notable: "Having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him, to reconcile all things to Himself; by Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven."

There are two difficulties in this Scripture. Firstly, how is it said that God has reconciled all things to Himself in Christ? Here, we are

specifically speaking of reconciling those who will be saved eternally, but the Apostle speaks of reconciling all things. God can be said to reconcile not only the saints but all things unto Himself in this regard: through Christ, everything that was subject to destruction due to man's sin is preserved in a good condition. When you observe the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all that exists and see their preservation, you must recognise that it is all through Christ. Had it not been for Christ, all things would have fallen into ruin and confusion instantly. Thus, God reconciles all things to Himself in Christ.

Furthermore, all things are reconciled in Christ in this regard: through Him, all things are made serviceable to His saints and reconciled ones. In this sense, all things can be said to be reconciled to God because they are reconciled to God's friends. Whereas before, all creatures were enemies to us through sin, now, through Christ, they have become useful to us and, therefore, to God by us.

A second difficulty in this text is: How has God reconciled all things in heaven through Christ? What things in heaven are reconciled to God through Christ? We must understand that the things in heaven, said to be reconciled, primarily refer to the angels.

But you might ask: How can the angels be reconciled through Christ, as there was never a falling out or enmity between God and them? I answer that, although in a proper sense, as reconciliation concerns man, there is no need to reconcile angels to God, there is now a closer, more secure, and firmer union made between God and the angels through Jesus Christ than there ever was before—or than there would have been, for all we know, if Christ had not come. In this regard, reconciliation may be said to involve things in heaven,

with God and the angels being made more firmly one through Christ than ever before.

Again, although the angels never sinned against God and were never actual enemies, they were in a position where they could have sinned. As creatures, they were frail in themselves and liable to fall from God and sin against Him, just like those who did fall. Therefore, in regard to the establishment they now have through Jesus Christ, being confirmed in a condition that makes it impossible for them to fall from God, they can also be said to be reconciled. Despite their original perfection, they could have fallen into the same state as those who are now reserved in chains for the judgement of the great day. But now, God has reconciled all things in heaven through Jesus Christ, so that even the angels themselves are more securely united with God than before.

Furthermore, the Lord has received them into a deeper affection of love through Jesus Christ than He did before. By looking upon the angels in and through Christ, God has a more thorough, firm, intimate, and complete affection towards them, establishing and accepting them through Christ. Moreover, they are reconciled to God —or rather, to us—since they have become our friends, whereas, initially, they were our enemies. In that sense, there is a kind of reconciliation. However, since I believe the text does not emphasise this point, we will move on.

Thus, you see how God was in Christ reconciling even the very angels themselves to some extent. This, then, is the first matter: the very thoughts that God had of entering into any terms or discussions with humanity about peace were through Christ. The fact that the Lord's heart was inclined towards humanity is because of Christ; that the Lord would be willing to accept any satisfaction is through Christ;

that we have any access to God whatsoever is through Christ. From one end of the work of reconciliation to the other, it is all through Christ.

To further explore this great point, I will propose the following:

1. Firstly, to briefly show you the necessity of Christ's involvement in our reconciliation with God and that it could be achieved no other way but through Christ.

2. Secondly, how Christ comes to be a suitable reconciler.

3. Thirdly, what Christ has engaged Himself to do and has performed according to His engagement for our reconciliation.

4. Fourthly, how what Christ has done is made over to us, and how we come to enjoy the fruit of it for our reconciliation with God.

5. Fifthly, the consequences that flow from this fact, namely that our reconciliation comes through Christ.

6. Sixthly, the reasons why God chooses to be reconciled to us through His Son rather than by any other means.

7. Lastly, to make some application of all these points.

These particulars might require some time to discuss, but because we often encounter much of this doctrine of reconciliation—and have done so at various times before, and are likely to do so again if God grants us further opportunities—I intend to present all these seven points to you in a very concise manner.

Chapter 13.

The Necessity of Christ's Coming in for Our Reconciliation

For the first, the necessity of Christ's coming in for our reconciliation; and surely this is something that must be instilled and emphasised to you repeatedly, for you cannot truly know God, Christ, or your own condition unless you understand the necessity of Christ's coming in to undertake the work of reconciliation.

I suppose if we were to ask any of you how you hope to be saved, you would promptly answer, "By Jesus Christ." However, truly understanding the absolute necessity of Christ's coming to reconcile us to God is not as common. Therefore, I beseech you to seriously consider it.

The necessity of it, in a word, is this: There was such a distance created between God and His creatures through sin that it necessitated a mediator to come between them. The distance was so great—God being the infinite First Being, and we, His creatures, being so far removed—that sin caused a separation between God and us that was so vast and wide that it required a mediator to intervene.

This was especially necessary because the Lord was resolved to have the wrong done to Him by the sin of man perfectly made right. Sin had wronged God, and God was determined that this wrong would be fully and completely rectified, and that He Himself would be entirely justified. God's justice demanded this, and thus stood the terms between God and man.

Man, having wronged God, found himself in a state of enmity, and God, in His infinite justice, resolved thus: "Though I am willing to be at peace with them, I will only do so if the wrong done to Me is made right. My justice must be fully satisfied; I must be justified because I am God, and there shall not be such a flaw remaining in My justice for all eternity that such creatures should sin against Me, and I should pass it by without requiring satisfaction. For," says God, "this would be a flaw in My justice forever, and that I will not permit. Therefore, I will be justified in the wrong done to Me by the fall of man."

It is true that when one human being seeks reconciliation with another, it is sometimes necessary to overlook an offence, especially when the offender is incapable of making restitution. However, it is not so between God and man. While one person may forgive another who has wronged them when they see that the offender is unable to make satisfaction, God's mercy has never operated in this way. Although God's mercy is infinitely greater than any creature's, the way in which God's mercy works is different from that of any creature.

This does not mean that there is less mercy in God than in a human; rather, God's mercy operates differently. The way God's mercy works is not to overlook the wrong done but to provide some means of satisfying that wrong Himself, to ensure that His justice is satisfied. Because this was necessary, it is through Jesus Christ that we are reconciled to God.

The necessity of Christ's role as mediator is not merely because we are grievous sinners in need of abundant mercy from God. If the only factors were that we are great sinners and in need of great mercy, there would not be a necessity for Christ. But, because we are great

sinners in need of God's mercy, and because the wrong done to God by sin must be made right and His justice fully satisfied, herein lies the necessity of Christ. Thus, God reconciled Himself to the world through Jesus Christ.

The truth is, although some of you have heard this many times before, you must understand that this is the great mystery of the Gospel. By presenting this to you repeatedly, perhaps God will grant you a deeper understanding of this truth. This is the mystery that even the angels desire to look into. They understand that God's justice must be satisfied, but they do not know it as deeply as the Church and the saints do. Therefore, they continually explore this mystery to see its further depths, as indeed there are greater and greater depths that we can never fully comprehend, reserved only for the time of the Resurrection.

Most people think that when they seek reconciliation with God, they are dealing solely with God as a merciful being. But you must know that when you seek reconciliation with God, you are dealing with more than just His mercy; you are dealing with God reconciling Himself to the world in His Son. You can never seek reconciliation with God in a true, evangelical way unless you seek it through His Son.

That shall briefly suffice for the first point: the necessity of Christ's coming into the work of reconciliation.

Chapter 14.

How Christ Becomes a Fit Reconciler

Opened in Seven Particulars:

1. Because He is the Second Person in the Trinity.
2. He has taken our nature upon Himself.
3. He fully knows the mind of the Father.
4. He fully knows what will satisfy the Father.
5. God the Father infinitely loves Him.
6. He has never offended the Father.
7. What He does has infinite efficacy and worth.

The second point presented in the twelfth chapter is this: How Christ becomes a fit reconciler. It is He who is the great peace-maker; and therefore, in Scripture, He is called the "Prince of Peace." It is He who is Melchizedek, King of Righteousness, and King of Peace. But how does He come to be so? It is by being a mediator between the Father and us, and as such, you shall find Him called in Scripture.

In Hebrews 8:6, we read: "But He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant," that is, of the covenant of grace and not that of works. Now Christ is a fit mediator to step in and mediate between God and us.

Among people, when there is a breach between two parties and they are at a distance, it often requires a mediator to come between them. This is not always necessary in human disputes, but since there was a breach between God and us, it was absolutely necessary that a mediator should step in to treat between God and us. There could never have been the slightest parley or treaty between God and fallen man had not a mediator intervened. This mediator is Jesus Christ, and it is He who is the only fit reconciler and peace-maker.

Firstly,

Christ is fit to be the reconciler **because He is the Second Person in the Trinity**.

You might ask, "How does this make Him fit?" The sin committed in the first transgression was more directly against the first person, God the Father. You may wonder why it was against one person more than the others. While the sin was indeed against all, it was more directly against the first person because man's first sin was against the perfection that God gave him in his creation—against that created righteousness that was imparted to him, which was especially the work of the first person of the Trinity.

Creation is attributed to the first person, and as man sinned against the work of creation, it follows that God the Father was especially offended. Therefore, the second person in the Trinity, who comes next in order, is fit to be a reconciler between the Father and us.

Secondly,

However, if Christ had only been the second person—if He were merely the Son of God—He could not have been the reconciler of us to God. There must be something more. When we ask who Christ is, you may ordinarily answer, "The Son of God." But if that were all—if He were only the Son of God and the second person in the Trinity—He could not, according to the way God has revealed in His Word, have been a fit mediator for us.

Therefore, to be a fit mediator to make our peace and reconcile God and us together, He took our nature upon Himself and became truly human. Thus, the same person is now both God and man. By taking

our nature into a personal union with the Son of God, He now partakes of both the natures that are to be reconciled. Observe this well.

Christ, who is to be the reconciler, is tasked with reconciling God and man, between whom there was a vast breach. To be fit for this work and reconcile these two, God and man, He partakes of both natures. By uniting human nature to Himself in personal union with the Godhead, He becomes both God and man, having an interest in both. He has an interest in God the Father, being the same God coequal with the Father (though not the same in a personal regard, but the same God), and He has an interest in humanity, sharing the same nature with us.

Therefore, in this regard, He becomes a fit mediator between God and us. This is the great work of God—to reconcile man to Himself—and in this, God must do a work that is far greater than the creation of Heaven and Earth. It would not have been as great a work for God to have made ten thousand worlds again as it was for God to create a mediator who would be both God and man in one person.

The union of the two natures of Christ is the greatest work that God has ever done from all eternity or ever will do, and yet this was required to reconcile us to Himself. Surely, you may well conclude that the work of reconciling a sinner to God is a greater matter since Heaven and Earth must be moved to achieve it. The greatest work ever done, or that ever will be done, had to be accomplished for this, or else it could never have been effected.

Thus, the Second Person of the Trinity had to come, take on our nature, and be made in the form of a servant to be a fit peace-maker or mediator between God the Father and us.

Thirdly,

Christ is a fit mediator in this: that He fully knows the mind of the Father and thoroughly understands, even to the utmost, what wrong the Father has received by our sin. If someone were to come to mediate between two people and ask the offended party to make peace, the offended party might say, "You speak to me in this way, but do you know what wrong has been done to me? If you truly understood the wrong that has been done, you would not think it so easy for me to be at peace."

In truth, if all the angels in heaven and all the men in the world were to intercede and attempt to make peace between God and a sinner for even one sin, God would immediately respond, saying, "Why do you attempt to undertake this work of making peace between me and a sinner? You do not understand the wrong that has been done to me by this sin. You do not comprehend the injury I have received. Therefore, you are not a suitable party to be a mediator."

In this regard, no angel in heaven could possibly be a fit peace-maker between God and man, for they do not fully understand the wrong that sin has done to God. But Jesus Christ knows to the utmost; He comprehends thoroughly and completely all the wrong and injury that has been inflicted upon the Father by the sin of man. He understands the extent of the harm the Father has sustained from all the sins of all men throughout the world—something no other creature, whether angels or men, could ever comprehend. In fact, they are so far from grasping the wrong that is done to God by the sins of the world that they cannot even comprehend the wrong done by the smallest sin that can be committed.

Fourthly,

Christ is a fit mediator because He fully knows what would please and satisfy His Father. If someone were to be a mediator to reconcile two parties who are in conflict, and if that person truly understood the mind of the offended party, they would be more qualified to heal the breach. Such a person who knows exactly, even down to the smallest detail, what will satisfy the offended party is indeed fit to be a mediator.

All the angels in heaven do not possess this knowledge to the extent that Jesus Christ does; only He fully and thoroughly knows the mind of God and what will satisfy Him. It is only Jesus Christ, who was with the Father and lay in His very bosom from all eternity, who fully understands what will satisfy the wrong that has been done to the Father. Therefore, He alone was the most suitable to undertake this work.

Fifthly,

Christ is a fit mediator in this respect: God the Father infinitely loves Him, and He is infinitely dear to the Father. It is a special quality for a mediator, especially one who seeks to reconcile, to be dearly loved by both parties, but particularly by the one who is offended.

If a poor man has offended a rich man in a town and thinks to himself, "Oh, if only I could be reconciled to him," he might seek out the person who is the rich man's closest and most intimate friend to speak on his behalf. He would likely believe that the matter would have a good outcome and that this friend would prevail.

In the same way, our mediator, who reconciles us to God, is infinitely dear to the Father. God the Father delights in Him above all else. Therefore, whatever Christ says or does must infinitely please God the Father. This is our mediator, who has come to reconcile us to

God. He can say and do nothing that does not infinitely please and delight the Father.

Furthermore, He is one who never did offend. There may be a friend who is very dear to the offended party, yet perhaps he himself has also offended. But Jesus Christ is one who never offended the Father, and has pleased Him from all eternity. Therefore, He is a fit mediator, suitable to speak on behalf of those who have displeased Him.

Consider, for example, a family: if one child has offended and another child comes to speak for his brother, the father might respond, "You need to speak for yourself, for you have also offended." But if another child, who has never offended his father in all his life and has been the most obedient child imaginable, comes and speaks, this is much more likely to influence the father. God the Father has declared before all the world that Jesus Christ is His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased; and it is this Christ who stands up to speak to God the Father on behalf of poor sinners, seeking their reconciliation with Him.

Lastly, He is a fit mediator in this: that whatsoever He does has an infinite efficacy in itself. He is not only a fit mediator because God is well pleased with Him, but because whatever He lays down as a means of satisfaction holds infinite value. There is such an infinite price, such an infinite worth in whatever Christ offers to purchase this reconciliation, that the infinite justice of God cannot but acknowledge, "This is indeed a valuable consideration, and I must recognise that there is efficacy and sufficiency in this to make full satisfaction, even if the sins of men had been a thousand times more than they are."

What a mediator we have to reconcile us to God! How is it that our sins create such a breach between God and us? It is because our sins were against such an infinite God in the first place; the enormity of the breach stems from the fact that the person against whom we have sinned is so infinitely great. Thus, the person who serves as our mediator, who acts and suffers on our behalf, possesses such a unique nature that whatever He does and suffers is wholly sufficient to satisfy the Father to the utmost extent.

All these things together—namely, that Christ is the Second Person, who is both God and man, who fully knows the mind of the Father, who understands the wrong our sins have inflicted upon Him, who knows what will satisfy the Father, who has never offended the Father, and who is infinitely beloved by the Father—mean that whatever He does possesses an infinite efficacy to satisfy justice itself. And in this regard, He is a truly fit mediator.

I emphasize these points to encourage the hearts of poor sinners to come to Him, for it is God in Christ who reconciles us to Himself.

Chapter. 15.

What Christ Has Undertaken and Performed in Our Reconciliation:

1. To Satisfy God's Justice; 2. To Bring Our Hearts and Subdue Them to God.

You may ask: you have shown us these two things—that it is not God alone and us, but God in Christ and us, who are reconciled. And you

have shown us what a reconciler Christ is, and how fitting. But concerning the third matter proposed in the 12th Chapter, what has Christ undertaken in this work of reconciliation? Surely, this is a great task, to come and reconcile sinful humanity to God. Christ must indeed have undertaken much in this regard. I will now explain what Christ has undertaken.

1. This agreement exists between Christ and the Father: He has undertaken that He will satisfy whatever His Father's justice shall require. As an example, if one were to come and make peace between two parties, where one has severely wronged the other, the mediator does not merely say, "Sir, I beseech you, for my sake, pass by the wrong and be reconciled to him," though this may achieve much, but it will not entirely accomplish the reconciliation. This is not the way to reconcile God and us. For Christ—although He is dear to the Father—does not merely plead and say, "O Father, these poor creatures have offended You, I beseech You, O Father, be reconciled to them." No, this is not all.

But, the offended party might ask, "Will you undertake to satisfy the wrong that has been done to me?" "Yes," says the mediator, "I will undertake it all; you shall set it all upon my account." And surely, you will all agree that if the mediator, who is dear to the offended party, not only pleads but undertakes to meet all that the offended party requires, and if he is capable of fulfilling his promise, this will surely bring about peace.

This is the transaction between God the Father and the Son. God looks upon humanity as being in enmity with Him, and Christ comes to mediate. "Yes," says the Father, "but what will you do to make peace? Will you undertake this on behalf of humankind? Will you

engage to satisfy the wrong they have done to Me?" "Yes, O Father," says Christ, "I will do it; I will stand between You and them, and undertake to satisfy all that Your justice demands."

In this respect, Christ is not only called a mediator, as in Hebrews 8:6 and onward, but He is also called a surety because He has undertaken to satisfy what God the Father required for the sins of humankind. And as He has undertaken it, so He has now accomplished it. The fathers who lived in former times could view God as reconciling Himself to the world in Christ, as Christ had undertaken the task, but had not yet fully discharged it. However, we can now view Christ not only as the one who undertook it but also as the one who has fully discharged and paid it all.

2. But that is not all; Christ has not only undertaken this. In the next place, as He has undertaken to satisfy God on His part, the Father might ask, "What shall become of these poor creatures? They have hearts opposed to Me, and they are enemies to Me, and whatever You do, they will still continue in ways of enmity towards Me."

"No," says Christ, "I will do more than this. I will undertake to bring them to You and subdue their hearts to You. Whereas they are now Your enemies, they shall come and submit themselves, and that wicked nature of theirs, I will take away through My Spirit. I will bring them into a peaceable disposition towards You so that they shall love You as a friend and love all that belongs to You. They shall love all Your ways, love Your people, and love Your holiness. I will undertake to bring them to You, as well as to satisfy You for what they have done."

This is evident, for in the Scriptures, wherever there is any mention of reconciliation, there is reference to our being reconciled to God, as well as God being reconciled to us. Indeed, the Scripture makes more

mention of our being reconciled, having been enemies to God, than of anything about God's work of reconciliation for us. That passage I quoted earlier in Colossians is exceedingly clear on this point, namely that Christ has undertaken our reconciliation. You heard before in Colossians 1:20 that He made peace through the blood of His cross; He undertook to satisfy, and that undertaking cost Him His blood. Our reconciliation cost Christ's death.

But then in verse 21, he says further: "You that were once alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works," as it is in your Bibles. But in the original text, it is "enemies in your minds [in] wicked works," not that you became enemies through your actions. This is where our adversaries gain an advantage, claiming it is not a sinful nature within us but that we acquire wicked habits through actions. However, it means that you were enemies in your minds, and you laid out all the enmity of your minds against God, displaying this enmity through your wicked works.

But he continues, "You who were thus alienated and enemies in your minds in wicked works, He has reconciled, to present you holy, unblameable, and unreprovable in His sight." There are two ways by which Christ reconciles us to God: first, through the blood of His cross, and secondly, through the body of His flesh in death, to present us holy, unblameable, and unreprovable in His sight. He has undertaken this latter task as well as the former. He has undertaken that we shall not remain enemies of God eternally, but that there shall be a time when we shall be brought to God and have gracious dispositions placed within us, so that we shall become friends of God and friends with all who belong to God.

Many speak much of Christ regarding His satisfaction and the transaction between God and Him. They think that because Christ

has undertaken to satisfy God's wrath, what need do we have to care about anything? What does it matter, they say, whether we live as we please, whether we do good or ill, for Christ has done all in the work of reconciliation.

But, my brethren, see the mistake: Christ has not only undertaken to satisfy and reconcile God to us, but He has also undertaken with God the Father to reconcile us to Him. Not only has He satisfied God, but He has also undertaken to bring us into a gracious frame and disposition of heart. Therefore, unless Christ accomplishes both, He does neither. It is true that one may have been completed from eternity—Christ may have undertaken one and promised to fulfil the other—but until Christ has actually accomplished the latter, you cannot conclude that He has done the former.

The man who convinces himself that Jesus Christ has accomplished the former without the latter deceives himself. Therefore, to believe in Christ as a reconciler is to believe in Christ as having undertaken these two things. First, He undertakes with God the Father to make satisfaction to Him. Secondly, He undertakes to bring us to the Father as well. As Christ must fulfil both, He will be as faithful in performing the second as He was in undertaking and discharging the first.

Few people consider this; they think much of Christ’s undertaking to satisfy God’s justice and to reconcile them to God but rarely consider that Christ has also undertaken to change their hearts and make them friends with God.

However, you who continue in wicked works, being enemies to God in your minds through wicked deeds, might think that God will be reconciled to you through Christ and that when you die, you shall be saved through Him. Remember this point: Christ, the Reconciler, has

undertaken with God the Father to both satisfy His justice and subdue your hearts so that you will no longer be His enemies. Therefore, if Christ has not accomplished the latter in your hearts, it is clear evidence that, as far as it appears, He never undertook to satisfy the justice of God for you.

Oh! What an argument this presents for people to be restless and uneasy in their natural state! You who continue in sinful and ungodly ways, you can be certain that, for the present, there is no evidence that Jesus Christ has undertaken with the Father to make any reconciliation for you. For if He had, He has also undertaken to bring your hearts to the Father and to make you friends with Him, just as He has made the Father friends with you.

On the other hand, any of you who feel the work of the Spirit in your hearts, who begin to sense Christ subduing your hearts to God—whereas before you lived in ways of enmity towards God, but now you begin to feel the power of Christ in His word breaking down those proud hearts of yours, and you see Christ changing your minds and bringing your hearts into submission to God—bless God for this. Know that this is part of Christ's undertaking with God the Father, and in doing this in your hearts, it is evidence that He has undertaken to satisfy God's justice for all your sins.

Thus, you see how Christ is a reconciler and mediator.

Chapter 16.

How What Christ Has Done for Our Reconciliation Comes to Be Made Ours.

1. Christ the Head of the Second Covenant.

There is a fourth point which I proposed in the twelfth chapter, and that is: How we come to be reconciled to God in Christ. It is true, Christ has accomplished this, as you have seen. But how do we come to have what Christ has done made ours, so that we may be reconciled to God?

In a word, thus: Christ is regarded by God the Father as the Head of the Second Covenant, and thus we are regarded in Him as covenant members, joined together in one body in Him. This is the means by which Christ reconciles God and us, and it is the means of conveying all the fruits of that reconciliation to us. This is the counsel of God concerning the children of men, that they might come to be reconciled and saved. As His Son has undertaken this task, it is not only that He stands between the Father and us. It is remarkable that there must be a union between Him and us, and He must present us to God the Father as one body with Himself. The Father must view Him as the Head of a covenant to which we likewise belong, so that His obedience and suffering are now regarded not as those of a private individual, but as the obedience and suffering of a public person who bears our names before God the Father.

And herein lies a further mystery of godliness. The reconciliation between man and man is achieved when a stranger comes, stands between them, and mediates; such a union between the mediator and those he mediates for is not required. But Christ does not come merely as a third party between God and us. Rather, He comes to take our very nature upon Himself, and we are made one with Him in the covenant of grace—He as the Head and we as the members.

Just as Adam stood before God as the Head of the first covenant of works, and we were all originally regarded in him and died in him, so Christ, who is called the Second Adam, stands before the Lord as the Head of the Second Covenant. All those for whom He mediates and seeks to reconcile to the Father stand before the Father in Him, so that His work is imputed to be theirs. The Lord regards them in their Head, fulfilling that second covenant of life and peace which He has made with poor creatures in Him.

Therefore, you must not only view Christ as the Saviour, as the Son of God in heaven; if you desire to look upon Him with comfort, you must regard Him as the Head of a second covenant, and view yourselves as joined with Him as members, presented to the Father through Him. Thus, God was in Christ reconciling Himself to the world—God looking upon Christ, and through Christ, as the Head of the covenant of grace. All those whom Christ undertook for, as covenant members joined together with Him, are reconciled to God and will be saved everlastingly. This is the mystery of the Gospel: God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

What Christ was has been explained, as well as what He has undertaken and how God views us through this Mediator. These are matters you must search into and cry out to God that, by His Spirit, He would open these mysteries of the Gospel to you. Then you shall see much of the mystery of grace and the mind of God, and thereby come to experience an abundance of peace with God, despite all the present remnants of uncleanness that remain in your hearts.

Chapter 17.

How We Come to Have an Interest in What Christ Has Done, Further Explained

We have shown in the previous chapter what Christ does for the continuation of this peace between God and us: that He is at the right hand of God, there making intercession for the saints continually. So, if there be anything that might (in its own nature) break the peace between God and us, this Mediator sits at the right hand of the Father, and there, by His intercession, He continually presents Himself to remove any such hindrance and to maintain the peace between God and us, so that no breach may arise in the future. This, I say, is what Christ undertakes to do, and this is a special work of His mediation: namely, His continual presence at the right hand of the Father, where He presents Himself to God to keep and maintain this peace, which He has established between the Father and us.

Again, if it be asked how we come to have an interest in what Christ does (which was the fourth point proposed in the twelfth chapter) in His satisfaction and in all that He undertakes:

The answer is this: Christ is made the Head of a second covenant. For, just as the foundation of the breach between God and us was first established through Adam, who was the Head of the first covenant, in whom we all sinned and so became enemies to God, so Jesus Christ is made a second Adam and the Head of a second covenant. All those regarded as the posterity of the second Adam (for so it must be) are regarded as one in Him. As all who were of the posterity of the first Adam were considered as one person in him, resulting in the breach and enmity between God and all that one man's descendants, so all those who belong to the posterity of the

second Adam, whether already born of Him or to be born by a spiritual generation (which the Scripture terms "regeneration"), are viewed as one with Him.

Hence, in 1 Corinthians 15:47, the Apostle speaks of the first and second Adam as if there were only two men in the world, for indeed, there are no more in that sense, nor ever were. "The first man," says the Apostle, "is of the earth, earthly; the second man is the Lord from heaven, heavenly." Here is the first man and the second man. You may ask, are there only two men in the world? No, not in that sense; that is, there have never been but two men who represented all others, and under those two men, all other people in the world are represented before God. All the children of men who fell from God are represented in the first Adam, who was the Head of the first covenant, and they stand under that covenant. And all those whom God intends to reconcile and glorify are represented before God in the second Adam, who is the Head of the second covenant.

It is true, if we speak properly, Cain was, in order, the second man in the world; but Christ is called the second man—that is, the Head of a second covenant, the second man with whom God entered into a covenant on behalf of other men, and in that sense, He alone is the second man. In the same sense, Adam is called the first man. Thus, God is reconciled to the world in Christ. As the breach was made between God and humanity through the first Adam, so through the second Adam, reconciliation is made between God and humanity. And as God imputes what the first Adam did to his descendants for condemnation, so He imputes what the second Adam did to the descendants of that second Adam for life and reconciliation. This is more extensively discussed in most of the fifth chapter of Romans, especially from the middle of the chapter to the end.

Chapter 18:

Eight Consequences of Our Reconciliation Being Made in Christ

1. It is a deep mystery.
2. It is very free.
3. It is sure and certain.
4. It is full.
5. It is an honourable way.
6. Yet in such a way as does debase man.
7. It is firm and everlasting.
8. This Reconciliation was a very difficult work.

There are yet the fifth and sixth particulars mentioned in the twelfth chapter that follow in the explication of this point of reconciliation with God in Christ, and when we have completed them, we shall proceed to the application of all six matters.

The fifth point is some consequences that follow from what has been spoken. For if we are reconciled to God in Christ, we may, from that premise, draw various consequences. I shall not now approach it by way of application, but merely show you how the consequences I shall name naturally flow from what has been said. For if the reconciliation between God and us is in Christ, then these particulars of it follow; and these things may be said concerning it.

Consequence 1

First, it follows that the reconciliation of the children of men with God is a very great and deep mystery. It is not something that can ordinarily be understood; it is not something that is accomplished in a natural way. To reconcile any soul unto God is done in a manner that is most deep and hidden, and is (in itself) a most glorious mystery. Therefore, when Scripture speaks of our reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ, it tells us that it is the hidden wisdom of God. In 1 Corinthians 2:7, it states, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery; even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world for our glory." It speaks of the very same matter as my text: namely, that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Jesus Christ. This, it says, was the wisdom of God in a mystery—the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world for our glory. And then again, in verse 10, "God has revealed them to us by His Spirit." The particle [them] is not in the Greek, but only this: "God has revealed to us by His Spirit," that is, this mystery, for "the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God." That is the first consequence: it is a mystery.

Consequence 2

The second is this: hence our reconciliation with God is very free—it is a work of free grace. It is God reconciling Himself in Christ; it is not reconciling Himself to us for what we do ourselves, or for what we can do. No, there is nothing that we do or can do, nothing that angels do or can do for us, that can reconcile us unto God. We are reconciled to God in Christ; therefore, the work of our reconciliation is nothing but free grace. We do not contribute anything at all to this great work—it is all done in Christ; it is entirely free. Even if anything is required of us, it is still God and Christ who must work it. Everything, every aspect of our reconciliation (whatever particulars there are in it) is all in Christ, and therefore it is altogether free grace

towards us. Christ is the gift of God, and everything that is indeed in Him, and by Him, is a free gift to us. That is the second consequence: that this reconciliation is free.

Consequence 3

The third aspect that may be noted is this: that our reconciliation is sure and certain. There is a sureness to this reconciliation. Why? Because God has worked so extraordinarily in this matter, and He would never work so remarkably on such a task without bringing it to completion; He would not allow this work, after all that has been accomplished, to come to nothing.

Those who hold to the doctrine of free will and assert that there is a price paid on the condition that we believe, but that it is left to ourselves either to believe or not to believe, and that God only proposes the means—what do they teach but this? That after all the counsels of God concerning our reconciliation, and after the great things God has done for us in Christ, it is in the power of man to render it all void and ineffective. They imply that there might not be a single soul reconciled in the end, for if it were left to man to believe or not believe, then it would also be within man's power to make all the counsels of God, and the great works of God in Christ, of no effect at all. Thus, after God has from all eternity planned this work, sent His own Son into the world to be made a curse for the sin of man, to die, and to do all that was necessary for reconciliation and atonement, if that doctrine were true—which is a falsehood of the greatest magnitude—it would have been possible, notwithstanding all that was done, for all to have been lost, and Christ might have died in vain, with not one soul in the world being saved.

But now, having seen that there is so much done to make up our peace and reconciliation with God, it necessarily follows, and can be

certainly concluded, that there are indeed some who are to be reconciled to God, and this work shall never be in vain. God will not have plotted such a great work, sent His Son into the world, and done so much for the sin of man, only for it to be lost in the end. He will certainly bring some to salvation.

I admit that when a poor sinner, made aware of what sin is and the breach that sin has created between him and God, considers the greatness of the work of being reconciled to God, he trembles and shakes within himself, fearing it might be too good to be true, and that it might not be certain or sure. Yet, when he comes to understand what God has done to accomplish this work, how God has not only promised it but that it is now done, that the Lord has indeed sent His Son into the world, that He has become man, been under the curse of God for man's sin, has been crucified, dead, buried, ascended into heaven, and now sits at the right hand of the Father, and that all the glorious mysteries of the Gospel spoken of in the Old Testament have been fulfilled and accomplished—when a sinner comes to understand this, then he believes, surely, there is a certainty, a sureness in this work of reconciliation with God.

Just as when Jacob heard that Joseph, his beloved son, was still alive, the text says that the old man's heart failed; he did not believe it, thinking it was too good to be true. But when his other sons showed him the chariots Joseph had sent and gave him such real evidence, not only that he was alive but that he was the greatest man in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, the text says that the spirit of Jacob revived, and he said, "Is Joseph my son still alive? I have enough." Similarly, when a sinner, made aware of the evil of sin and the magnitude and extent of the breach between him and God, hears the preaching of the doctrine of reconciliation and how all his sins can be pardoned, and that God can become his true friend, enabling

him to be saved and eternally glorified in the highest heavens, the heart of a poor sinner begins to waver. But when he learns of the great things God has done to bring about this work—that God has, in His infinite wisdom, established such a glorious way of reconciliation, that He sent His Son, who became man, endured the wrath of His Father, satisfied for man's sin, died, shed His blood, and now ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, as an advocate and intercessor—then the sinner comes to believe there is a reality, a certainty in this work of reconciliation.

My brethren, the work of reconciliation is indeed a sure thing. It is not merely a notion, a fancy, or an imagination; it is a reality, and a certainty. This certainty follows from the fact that it is [in Christ]. We could never be so sure of the matter if we did not have these real demonstrations of God's heart towards us.

Suppose God had sent an angel from heaven to preach to the children of men the doctrine of reconciliation, telling them that God was willing to be reconciled unto them; this would not have made it as certain. The hearts of poor sinners would have continued to be afraid, thinking that whatever was said to them was but an attempt to soothe them for the present. Certainly, the matter would not have been as declared. However, when God pleases to give this evidence to us of His heart towards us, and of His willingness to be reconciled to us—having worked so extraordinarily for us in sending the second person of the Trinity to become man and accomplish this work of reconciliation—we may certainly conclude that the heart of God is real in this matter.

In Romans 4:16, we have an expression to this effect: "Therefore it is of faith," says the Apostle. What is "it"? It refers to the promise of life and peace, for that is what the Apostle is speaking about in that

passage. "It is of faith," why? "That it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure." Note here these two characteristics of our reconciliation with God: we are reconciled in Christ. From this, firstly, it follows that it is a great mystery. Secondly, it follows that it is free; "therefore," says he, "it is of faith that it might be free." It is of faith, as if to say, it is from God in Christ, for faith always relates to Christ. "It is of faith," that is, faith in Christ, so that it might be by grace. For if it were by any works we performed, it would not be free; it would not be by grace. But it is by faith in Christ, so that it might be by grace.

Secondly, it is of faith in Christ, to the end that the promise might be sure. You may ask, "Would it not be sure if it were not by faith?" Suppose God had only sent an angel (as mentioned earlier), would it not have been sure? No, not as sure as it is now; for in that it is by faith upon Christ, we have Christ as the object of our faith for our reconciliation with God, and by this, it becomes more certain than it could be by any other means. We cannot conceive that it would be possible for the Lord to reveal the reality of His heart and the certainty of His work in reconciling the world to Himself in any way more convincingly than by revealing it to be in Christ. And that is the third point that follows from this.

Consequence 4

The fourth consequence is this: if our reconciliation is in Christ, then, as it is sure, so it is full. Indeed, if reconciliation with God were revealed to us in any other way than in Christ, we might fear there was something still in the heart of God against us, that His heart did not fully embrace us or that we were not fully reconciled with Him. But when we understand what God has done to reconcile us to Himself—what a price He has paid for it, the great cost He has borne

to accomplish it, and that His own Son has undertaken to bring us and the Father together to make this reconciliation complete—we can conclude that it is a full and perfect reconciliation. Jesus Christ would never undertake such a work without bringing it to completion, and He has indeed completed it. Therefore, when you hear the word of the Gospel that we are reconciled to God in Christ, you can be assured that this work is both full and complete, because it is accomplished in Him. That is another consequence.

Consequence 5

Furthermore, if our reconciliation with God is in Christ, then it follows, in the fifth place, that God is reconciled to humankind on very honourable terms; it is an honourable reconciliation, for it is a reconciliation in which God suffers nothing at all, but instead, everything is restored to Him. If God had merely overlooked our offences and been reconciled to us without any further action, the devils might have cried out against Him, saying, "Where is the glory of Your justice? These have sinned against You just as we have, and the breach they have made upon Your justice is in no way made right; You have been dishonoured by them, and that dishonour has not been addressed." But now, with humankind reconciled to God in Christ, no devil in Hell can speak against God's justice or righteousness. For God is not only reconciled, but He is reconciled on honourable terms.

Indeed, when a man has an inferior who has offended him, and if he can find no other way to address the wrong but to endure all the injury done to him, it is a far different matter from being reconciled to the offending party on honourable terms. For if he could have the wrong fully made right, and not only have the offender submit to him, but also receive full satisfaction for the injury done, that would

be truly honourable. Such is the reconciliation between God and us; it is so honourable that it will bring glory to God before the angels and saints for all eternity, and God rejoices in it greatly, as it brings Him immense satisfaction that His honour is restored in this reconciliation. That is a fifth consequence.

Consequence 6

Sixthly, if we are reconciled to God in Christ, it follows that this reconciliation is accomplished in a way that entirely humbles humanity. Though it is an honourable reconciliation, it is one in which humankind has no reason to boast. It is the greatest possible way to lower and humble humanity. There could be no devised method of reconciliation that would so reconcile us to God while at the same time abasing us as much as this way of reconciliation, when we truly consider it.

For though we are reconciled, how did it happen? We did not initiate it ourselves; we did nothing to bring it about; it was all done by Christ. Therefore, in Romans 3:27, the Apostle asks, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith." Indeed, God has done great things for us, but none of what has been done for us is to our own credit; it was all accomplished without our contribution. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and therefore, although it is honourable (in respect of God), when we truly consider it, we have ample reason to be humbled, even to the very dust.

Consequence 7

Furthermore, if our reconciliation is in Christ, it follows that it is a most firm and lasting reconciliation, an everlasting reconciliation. Since it is in Christ, this forms the basis of its everlasting nature.

Hence, nothing can ever make a breach again between God and us, such that we should once more become His enemies. Therefore, when we understand this reconciliation with all its properties and consequences, we understand what it truly means to be reconciled to God.

Consequence 8

There is one more consequence or property of this reconciliation that I must add to what I have mentioned before, and that is this: if we are reconciled to God in Christ, then certainly the work of reconciliation is a very difficult task; it is a mighty and hard thing. Heaven and earth had to be moved before this could be accomplished, and God even shakes the heaven and the earth in this work. It was the most difficult work that God Himself ever undertook, and the most difficult work the Son undertook. For when He took it upon Himself, we find that He sweat drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, and before He completed it, it cost Him His very heart's blood. Therefore, it was not an ordinary or simple task to reconcile God and humankind, but a most challenging and arduous work, because it was accomplished in Christ.

Chapter 19

Three Reasons Why God Would Be Reconciled to the World in Christ and No Other Way

1. Because God the Son is most glorified this way.

2. Because God the Father is most glorified this way.
3. Because there was no other way as effective to melt the hearts of sinners or to encourage them to come to God.

But there still remains the task of showing you the reasons why God chose to reconcile Himself to the world through Christ and no other way. I will give you just these three reasons.

Reason 1

First, because in this way, the Father glorifies His Son. Had it not been for this method of atonement, we would have had little understanding of the glory of the second Person of the Trinity, nor indeed of the third Person, nor the distinction of the Persons. Therefore, before the Gospel was made known to humankind, the distinction of the Persons in the Trinity was very little understood. In places where the Gospel is not revealed or made known, there is no full understanding of the distinction of the Persons in the Trinity.

Now, for the sake of glorifying the Trinity, and more specifically to glorify the second Person—the Son of God, who plays the central role in the work of reconciliation—God chose this way of reconciliation. It is true that the third Person, the Spirit, is sent by Christ, and in the completion of the work of reconciliation, the glory of that Person also appears. However, the main weight of the work lies upon the Son, and it is for the glory of the Son of God that He appointed this way to be reconciled to the world.

Indeed, it is such a work that the Son Himself takes great glory in it and considers this to be a significant part of His glory—that He is appointed by God the Father to be the Mediator, to reconcile God and humanity. Please observe this: the work of reconciliation between God and us is something in which Christ Himself takes

glory. It is what He counts as next in importance to the glory He has personally with the Father, as He was begotten by Him from all eternity. Next to that, Jesus Christ glories in being appointed to be a Mediator between the Father and sinful humanity.

That Christ Himself glories in this work can be seen in Scripture. The passage in John 13:31 is remarkable for this. "Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him.'" Glorified now—when? It was when Judas betrayed Him, and He was about to shed His blood and die for the sins of humanity, to complete and perfect this work of atonement or reconciliation. "Now," He said, "is the Son of Man glorified." It is as if He had said, "I was indeed designated by the Father from all eternity to undertake this work of reconciliation. I came into the world for this very purpose, and all this time I have been preparing for it, but the main work is still to be accomplished. Now I am about to die, and this death of mine will bring the work to completion. Now," He said, "is the Son of Man glorified."

Yes, this is the glory I have anticipated from all eternity; this is the glory I rejoiced in when I was in the bosom of the Father. For I knew of this; I knew I was appointed to be a Mediator; I knew it would cost Me My blood to complete this work, and now the time has come for it to be performed. Therefore, now the Son of Man is glorified. I say, Jesus Christ considers it His glory to be appointed to stand as a Mediator between God and us.

You will find, therefore, that when Scripture speaks of Christ's being appointed for this work by God, He rejoiced in it exceedingly. Psalm 40:6 states: "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast not required. Then said I, 'Lo, I come.'" What is it that God spoke to Him,

to which His ear was opened? What God the Father said to Him was this: "Son, the work of reconciliation between Myself and sinful humanity, I have appointed and designated you to it. I have appointed you to be a Mediator between us, and to undertake to make satisfaction such that sinful humanity and I may be at peace, so that mercy and justice may be reconciled together."

For let me tell you, as I have mentioned before, God and we could never have been reconciled unless mercy and justice were reconciled. Now God the Father tells Jesus Christ that He has appointed Him to this work. And Christ says, "Mine ear hast thou opened." Oh, I accept this work gladly; yes, even though I know I must become a sacrifice for the sins of humanity.

Observe what follows in verse 7: "Then said I, 'Lo, I come; I am ready and willing to do this work, for in the volume of the book it is written of me, that I should do thy will.'" That is, it was written in the Scriptures before Christ ever came into the world, that He should come to perfect this great work. And in verse 8, He says, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart."

What was this will of God? Certainly, this will of God spoken of here was that Christ should be a Mediator between God and humanity, to bring about this reconciliation. And, oh, He says, "I delight to do this will of Thine, even though it is a will that will cost Me dearly." He says, "Thy law, this law that requires Me to come and be a sacrifice and to shed My blood, so that I may be a Mediator between humanity and God—this law is within My heart."

This is one reason why God chose this way of reconciling Himself to the world: because it magnifies the glory of His Son, and His Son acknowledges that it is His glory. Therefore, just when He was about to die, He declared these words: "With desire I have desired to eat

this Passover," because that was to pave the way for His death, which would bring about the fulfilment of this work of reconciliation.

Reason 2

A second reason why God chose this way of reconciling man to Himself is because, in this way, the Father Himself is most glorified. The attributes of God shine with greater lustre in this way of reconciliation than if God had simply passed over the offence without any further action. Now, the glory of His wisdom, power, and justice shines forth, as well as His mercy. Not only does His mercy shine, but the other divine attributes of God are exceedingly radiant in this way of reconciliation. There is no clearer glass through which to behold the glory of God than the glory of the Gospel in the mystery of reconciliation.

Indeed, we do behold and see the glory of God in the mirror of creation, but in the Gospel—in the work of reconciliation in Christ—there is a brilliant glass in which all the beams of God's glorious attributes are united and shine with transcendent brightness. Moreover, there is not only a lustre and radiance, but also a warmth that is felt in beholding them. In this way of reconciliation, God Himself is glorified.

Therefore, in that text I mentioned, John 13:31, you find that as Christ acknowledged Himself to be glorified by this work, He also said, "My Father is glorified in Me." Likewise, in John 17, at the beginning, Christ says, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee." And in verse 4, He says, "I have glorified Thee on earth." How did He glorify God? "I have finished the work that Thou gavest Me to do,"—that work of mediation, that work of reconciliation between Thyself and sinful humanity. "That

work I have finished, and in that work, I have glorified Thee upon earth."

Indeed, this is the glory that God expects from the children of men—that He may be admired and magnified in this great work of reconciling the world to Himself through His Son. And that is the second reason.

Reason 3

A third reason is this: The Lord saw that there was no other way so effective in melting the hearts of sinful creatures and drawing them to come and be reconciled to Himself as this way. There was no other way to encourage the hearts of poor sinners to come and be reconciled to God as effectively as the consideration of the great things the Lord has done to make peace and reconciliation between Himself and sinners.

God foresaw this, and because He desired a way to break the hardest heart in the world and to draw the most stubborn and obstinate sinner to Himself, He chose this way above all others for reconciliation. This is illustrated in the parable of the vineyard, where the owner let it out to husbandmen. It tells us that when the master sent one servant, they beat him; he sent another, and they beat him too. Finally, he said within himself, "I will send my son; surely they will respect him."

It is as if He were saying, "Here are a company of hard-hearted, stubborn, and wicked creatures in this world. They have been presented with one argument and another to persuade them to come to Me, but their hearts are so hardened that they resist all the arguments they have heard. Nothing strikes their hard hearts; nothing melts them, nothing persuades them to come to Me. But I

have one argument left, and this will break even the most stubborn and hardened heart; and if they are among those appointed to life, if they are not lost creatures forever, what is this argument? It is this: I am reconciling Myself to the world in My Son. I will send My Son into the world to work out this reconciliation, and through this, I will reveal so much of My glory that when they come to see it, their hearts shall be filled with awe. They shall stand in wonder at the goodness and riches of My grace, their hearts will melt before Me, and at last, they shall be drawn to Me. When they come to hear of this, it will certainly be the most powerful argument."

It is the most dangerous thing in the world for the hearts of men not to be melted and not to be won over by this doctrine of our reconciliation with God in Christ. Remember this: if your hearts, when you come to hear of this doctrine, are not moved, are not drawn to God, it is a troubling sign that you may be lost creatures. For God Himself sees this way of reconciliation as the most persuasive and compelling argument He could ever use to win the heart of any person. And if you do not find your hearts affected by this, you may take it as a sign of a very dangerous condition in which you are.

I dare appeal to those whose hearts God has won over to Himself: let them say, what was it that won their hearts? What was it that most effectively broke their hearts and caused them to turn to God? Was it not the revealing of this mystery of reconciliation in Christ? Was it not God’s offer of mercy to the souls of poor, sinful creatures in Christ? Woe to those who sit under the ministry of the Gospel, hearing the blessed message of reconciliation in Christ, and yet do not find their hearts moved by this argument. For this was one special reason why God chose this way of reconciling Himself to the

world—that He might, through it, win the hearts of men and women to Himself forever.

Thus, you have now been shown all these aspects of the matter, in addition to the Scriptural proof of it. First, you have seen that there could be no reconciliation but in Christ. Secondly, that Christ was a fit Mediator to reconcile God and us together, and how that was so in particular. Thirdly, what Christ undertook to do for the reconciliation of us to God and what He continues to do to this very day. Fourthly, how we come to have an interest in what He has done for our reconciliation. Fifthly, the various properties or consequences of this reconciliation, which help us understand what kind of reconciliation it is. And finally, the reasons why God chose to reconcile the world to Himself in this way rather than in any other.

Chapter 20

APPLICATION.

USE 1: See the woeful misery sin has brought us into; humiliation for sin is necessary

This improvement of all that has been discussed now follows in the application to ourselves. Indeed, a great part of what has been previously insisted upon, though it has been done by way of explanation, has also been applicable. But there are still further points by way of application to be presented to you, all flowing naturally from what has been taught. Neither shall I need to be lengthy, because it is simply a matter of impressing upon your hearts the same truths that I have already elaborated on in opening up the subject.

First, from this point—that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself—there is presented before us the woeful misery that sin has brought us into. Nothing sets out the breach between God and man more than this: that the making up of that breach must be through Christ.

There is a great question currently being discussed: whether humiliation is necessary or not; whether men must be made aware of their natural condition, be humbled, and thereby be brought to Jesus Christ. Many people seize upon the misuse of this concept of humiliation and, as a result, completely dismiss it (though very ignorantly), because some have treated humiliation as though it were a condition of the covenant, which indeed it is not. And when they hear us say that it is not a condition, they immediately conclude that

there is no need for it at all, because, they say, humiliation does not grant us an interest in Jesus Christ. Moreover, because some may perhaps place too much trust in their humiliation and rely upon it, others seek to remove it entirely.

However, although humiliation is not the condition of the covenant, though it does not grant us an interest in Jesus Christ, and though it is not something we are to rely upon, yet there is a great need for it. We must be made aware of our lost condition due to sin; and from what has been explained, you can see the necessity of it.

Consider this: I assume that if you believe God will pardon your sins and that He will be reconciled to you, you believe that this is through Christ. "Yes," you will say, "that is certain." And therefore, since Christ has accomplished our reconciliation, why do we need to be humbled for our sin?

Certainly, my brethren, in what you say, if you truly understand it, there is implied the deepest work of humiliation and the strongest argument for it that any creature could be capable of in this world.

How is that, you might ask? This way: "I believe that God is reconciled to me in Christ." What? Has God worked my reconciliation through His Son? Has He brought it about through Jesus Christ and chosen this way above all others to accomplish it? Then, certainly, the breach between God and me, due to my sin, must have been such that all the angels in heaven and all the people in the world could never have made it right. Such was the breach that my sin had caused between God and my soul that it required so great a mystery of godliness to repair it, a mystery that even the angels themselves are not able to comprehend. Indeed, it is the greatest work that God has ever done, or that He will ever do, for all eternity.

Consider what it cost to make up the breach that sin had caused between God and your soul.

And again, if you believe that you are reconciled to God in Christ, you do not only see and are convinced of the greatness of that breach, but you must also be aware of it. For can I look beyond myself and exercise such a glorious act of faith in Christ as Mediator, and yet not be aware of what Christ has done? Certainly, the work of faith can never be established in the heart unless it is done in such a way that the sinner knows what he is doing when he believes and is conscious of his actions.

And if this is so, consider these two things: when a person believes in Christ as Mediator, he knows what he is doing; when he believes, he is aware of his actions. Take these two things for granted, and I will guarantee that this soul will be humbled. It follows naturally and need not be required as a condition—it is as necessary to the work of faith as light is to the sun when it shines or as heat is to the fire; indeed, it is implied.

For example, when I am to go to a certain place or attend to a particular matter, it is true that going is not a condition explicitly required. It is not demanded that I should travel a specific number of steps, but rather that I should be at a certain place on a certain day to fulfil a particular task. Though this is not stated as a condition, the act of going is as necessary as the other; and even if it is not explicitly required, it is implied in the action that is required and should be regarded as necessary, just as if it were a condition.

In the same way, it is true that humiliation is not a condition of the second covenant; it is not what grants us an interest in Jesus Christ, but it is something that the nature of faith necessarily implies. For faith is a rational grace, and indeed, it is the most glorious work of

the soul that has ever been. For a soul to believe in God through Christ, to believe that God is reconciled to it in Christ, is the most glorious act under heaven.

Now, when I believe in Christ as a Saviour, what is He a Saviour from? A Saviour from my sin, a Saviour from the wrath of God, and this the soul must necessarily be conscious of; otherwise, how can it exercise such an act of faith? And I know of no faithful preacher in the world who has ever emphasised humiliation more than this: that when people believe in Christ, they must understand and be aware of what they are doing. You must understand that Christ is a Mediator, and if He is a Mediator, what is He mediating for? Why, to repair a breach between God and you. Then you must understand what that breach is—the breach that your sin has caused. And you must know what that sin is: that your sin has provoked the justice of God and placed you under the curse of the law.

So, you see the necessity of explaining the law. Although it is not something that gives us an interest in Christ, it follows naturally as a necessary consequence; without it, you cannot understand Christ as a Reconciler.

Therefore, this is the first use: if God will never be reconciled to any soul but through Christ, then that soul which comes to be saved must come to see itself in a most woeful condition. For a creature that requires such a Mediator must be in an utterly wretched, damnable, miserable, and cursed condition within itself; otherwise, it could never require such a Mediator.

And certainly, there is no better way to honour Christ than this. When people speak of Christ and of free grace, unless they teach others about the breach that sin has caused between God and them, how can their audience understand what Christ is? Christ is a

Mediator—but for what purpose? To save from sin. From what sin? What is sin? Sin must be made known if Christ is the Reconciler between God and us, because reconciliation implies a breach, and a breach that is made by sin. If you do not understand what that breach is, how can you honour Christ as Mediator?

Therefore, you must understand what that breach is: it is the enmity that exists in your hearts by nature. You must understand what that enmity is and be aware of it; otherwise, you can never give glory to God in Christ. Although many speak so much about Christ and free grace, it is evident from their lives that they do not truly give glory to Christ. Christ has little reason to be thankful for any honour they offer Him in their conduct; rather, they blot and stain the name of Christ. And why is this? The truth is, they never rightly understood Christ as a Mediator; they never knew what it meant to need a Mediator between God and themselves, and so, having only a superficial knowledge of Christ, Christ receives only superficial glory from them.

That is the first use.

Chapter 21

Use 2: Discovering Mistakes about Reconciliation

2. If God has reconciled Himself to the world in Christ, then we are to take notice of the great mistakes that exist in the world regarding the point of reconciliation with God. Certainly, if this

> is true—that the only way to make our peace with God is in Christ—then the world is generally mistaken in this great matter of reconciliation with God. And a mistake in this is a destructive, damning error; a soul may perish eternally merely through a misunderstanding in the matter of reconciliation.

A person may be troubled by sin, may cry out about their sin, may break off from practising sin, and may cry out to God in prayer, asking Him to pardon and be reconciled to them. Yet, if they misunderstand and do not realise that it must be God, in and through Christ, who reconciles Himself, this error may prove to be a fatal one. Even if they were to cry out about their sins all their days, they might perish in the end if they do not know and rightly understand how to accept God's mercy as it is in Christ. If they do not understand that it is God in Christ who reconciles Himself to the world, they will be lost.

We know that the vast majority of people look for reconciliation with God merely in a natural way. They have sinned against Him, and they will cry out to Him for mercy and pardon, thinking that this alone will be sufficient to make peace between God and them. I remember that Luther had a notable statement concerning this, in his meditation about the way that God has appointed for reconciling man to Himself, which is in Christ. He said, "It is intolerable and horrible blasphemy to imagine any work by which you may presume to please God." He then explained why: it is intolerable and horrible blasphemy for anyone to presume that any work can pacify God when it is clear that God cannot be pacified in any other way but by the blood of His Son—one drop of which is more precious than the entire creation.

Reflecting on God reconciling the world to Himself, and that this was done through such a costly way as the blood of His Son, whose single drop is of greater value than all creatures in heaven and earth, Luther affirmed that it is indeed a horrible and intolerable blasphemy for anyone to think they can pacify God by any other means. When God has appointed such a way of reconciliation, it is especially heinous for a person to neglect this and believe that any work of their own will suffice. For those who hear the Gospel preached and yet still think of finding another way of their own, neglecting the way God has appointed, this is truly a most intolerable and horrible blasphemy.

Certainly, it is something that greatly provokes the Lord when a sinner, made aware of the breach that exists between God and themselves, thinks that this breach can be healed by acts of repentance, good intentions, or good works. The Lord refuses to consider such a sinner in their foolishness, for one to think that the breach between God and them is a matter of such little consequence that it can be resolved by prayers or fears or anything else they can do. All of this is nothing more than untempered mortar.

Indeed, when there is repentance and a turning to God, it is a good sign that God is at work within a person's heart. But repentance alone cannot achieve the task; it is in Christ, it is the blood of the Son of God that must provide satisfaction for sin—it is this that brings about reconciliation. This is the essential doctrine of the Gospel, and until you receive this truth into your understanding and into your heart, all other things we preach will be of no benefit to you. It will never do you any good until you have embraced this truth. You will never sanctify God's name, nor glorify God in your actions, nor have any true peace within yourself, until you come to accept this truth in your heart: that God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

Take heed, therefore, against any misunderstanding on this point. That is the second use.

Chapter 22

Use 3: To Encourage Sinners to Come to God for Reconciliation, and Discouragements Removed

The third is a use of encouragement to sinners to seek reconciliation with God. You may remember that one reason why God purposely appointed this way to reconcile Himself to the world was that He might break the hearts of sinners and encourage them to come to Him. Is this God's purpose? O! That He might achieve this end in your souls!

We have endeavoured to open up this doctrine of the Gospel—namely, of God's reconciling Himself in Christ—and we have not done this only from this text but from others as well. Though various other things have been spoken, you cannot but know that the aim of it all has been to this end: that God may gain glory by drawing our hearts to Himself, and that it might be an encouragement for you to come and be reconciled to God.

Are there any who are aware of the breach that sin has made between God and their souls? I suppose there are many. You have expressed complaints about the hardness of your hearts and that you cannot be as aware of your sins as you desire; it is a sign that you have some sense of the breach between God and yourself. Now the Lord, in

opening up this doctrine, sets forth the way of reconciliation, and He earnestly desires to draw your hearts to come and be reconciled to Him. What is it that hinders you? There are only two things that hinder this.

First, the great distance that exists between God and a creature: "I am a poor, vile worm, and the Lord is an infinite, glorious, and dreadful God." O! That I might remove this dreadfulness from you so that it might not scare or hinder you. Therefore, God presents Himself to you in His Son. If God were to speak from heaven with thunder and lightning and call sinners to humble themselves and seek to make peace with Him, that might frighten you, and seeing the distance between God and yourself, you might not dare to come. But God says, "I call you now in my Son, my Son who came to be like one of you and to understand your infirmities; it is in Him that I offer you reconciliation." This removes the dreadfulness of God from sinners and therefore is a great encouragement.

Even though there is such a distance between God and us, there is a Christ between God the Father and us. Though we are the poorest worms in the world, and though we may be mean and vile creatures, even if we were ten thousand times meaner than we are, having such a mediator between God and us makes up the distance. Christ is such a mediator that there is enough in Him to bridge all the distance that exists between God and man.

The second hindrance or discouragement is sin: whether it be the greatness of our sin, the multitude of our sins, or the long continuance in our sins, this is what often hinders us from coming. "O!" says the soul, "I have been such a vile sinner, I have continued so long, and I have multiplied sin one after another; is it even possible for someone like me to be reconciled?" It is true that if you

were dealing only with God as He is in Himself, you might despair. But know, O sinner, that it is God reconciling Himself in Christ. Therefore, even though you are a great sinner, and have been one for a long time, there being reconciliation with God in His Son—seeing that Christ has undertaken the work of making peace between God and sinners and mediating for them—you may be encouraged to come in and lay hold of this grace of God in Christ.

If you say you are unworthy, and that there is nothing in you that would make God regard you, all this is still answered with this: it is God who is reconciling the world to Himself in Christ. Indeed, if it were so that there was only God and you to deal together, and if you were to deal only with God Himself, you might be afraid. But you are dealing with God not in Himself, but in His Son, for He has presented Himself to the world in this way. He is reconciling the world to Himself in His Son, and therefore, this may encourage you, despite all your unworthiness.

And what further do you have to discourage you?

O! you may say, "God is infinitely just to punish sin."

Still, this point will be sufficient to remove all discouragements: that He is reconciling the world to Himself. Though He is holy, His holiness is satisfied in Christ. Though He is just, His justice is satisfied in Christ. Therefore, there is enough in this point to take away all objections and to remove all discouragements that any sinner in the world may have.

And so, as God puts this forward with the purpose of drawing sinners to Himself, that they might be reconciled to Him, let them know that the more grace is given here for removing all objections and discouragements, the more sinners will be left without excuse on that

day if they do not come and lay hold of this grace of God in Christ. God will have His glory that way if He cannot have it the other. God primarily seeks His glory in reconciling the world to Himself; therefore, He removes all discouragements so that sinners may come in and risk their souls upon His rich grace and mercy in Christ.

But if God cannot have His glory from this, then the more this is preached to any congregation, the more God will have His glory by stopping the mouths of men, so they will not be able to say on that day, "O, the Lord was terrible, and He was a hard master, and I did not dare go to Him. My conscience told me I had sinned against Him, but I did not dare to seek His mercy because I was afraid of Him." The mouths of men shall be silenced on that day if they have heard this doctrine of God reconciling the world in Christ and have not come to lay hold of it.

Indeed, it is often the excuse of a servant who has offended his master when someone comes to him and says, "Why do you not go and humble yourself before your master?" "O," he says, "I dare not; he is such a furious man that he will immediately be enraged. I would rather suffer greatly than go to him." And they think this is excuse enough. Many poor servants would rather wander up and down the country and perish than return to their master.

But no sinner can say this of God. Let him be the most vile sinner who is turning away from God. If someone were to come to him and say, "You wretched sinner, where are you going? You are departing from God, you are moving away from Him, but behold, God calls you to return. O, go and humble yourself, lament your sin, and lay down all those weapons of enmity against God that you have taken up." This sinner now cannot say, "How shall I dare to look upon God? I,

who have been such a vile and wretched sinner, surely God will destroy and consume me."

No, the Lord presents Himself to you as a God of mercy in His Son and tells you that He has provided a means through His Son to be reconciled with you. His heart has been so intent on reconciling Himself to the children of men that He has sent His Son to do this work, and though it cost the very blood of His Son, yet He will do it. Therefore, sinner, if you do not come and continue to wander from God and remain in ways of enmity against Him, your blood will be upon your own head.

You have heard this blessed doctrine of the Gospel explained—that God is reconciling Himself to the world, and that He is doing so through His Son. God expects that when this message is brought to a congregation, the whole congregation should come and turn to Him, and that the world should be filled with cries, "O! that we might be reconciled to Him." Our Lord expects today from some of you to hear you reflect on this by crying to Him for reconciliation through His Son. That should be the result of such sermons as these.

God, ever after such preaching, looks to hear some soul repeat in prayer to Him what it has heard from the ministry of the Word, and upon that make a prayer to Him according to what it has heard. As in this manner: The Lord expects that today some sinner should get alone and cry to God in prayer, "Lord, I have heard, not only that there is a possibility for sinners to be reconciled, but that there is such a glorious way of reconciliation that You have accomplished it in Your Son. Such an honourable and certain way of reconciliation, and that Your heart is greatly invested in it. And Lord, I have heard that this is a way that removes all objections in the world, all the discouragements that can be imagined; and You have revealed it with

the purpose of breaking the hearts of sinners and drawing them to come in and accept that blessed covenant that You have offered to them in Christ, and to be reconciled to You. Now, Lord, I desire to cast my soul upon this free grace of Yours in Your Son; O! that I might feel Your Spirit enabling me for such a glorious work as this."

O! that the Lord might hear such things as these from some of your closets today. It will cause the heart of God to rejoice that He ever opened the doctrine of reconciliation to you; otherwise, it will turn to the quite opposite end—it will only serve to silence your mouths on the great day. That is another use.

Chapter 23

Use 4: Do Not Despair of God's Making Peace in This Nation

Yet once more: If there is such a way of reconciliation between God and us, if God has worked it so that it is in Christ, then truly, from this, we have no cause to despair in God's power, wisdom, and goodness to make peace in this nation. God has done the greater work. You see that God is a God of peace and loves peace; and in order that He might be at peace with the wretched children of men, He has worked so wonderfully as to send His own Son into the world and provide such a way to ensure that peace may be made, and through that way, He has done it. He has made peace between mercy and justice; there is peace made between an infinitely provoked God and wretched, sinful, vile creatures.

I told you before that this was a mighty difficult work, indeed, the most difficult that ever was or can be in the world. If God has therefore accomplished such a difficult work in such a glorious way, then from this, learn not to despair but believe that God can work even peace for us in this nation, and that it can be an honourable and good peace as well. We are not only encouraged by this to cry unto God for peace between Him and our souls, but we are also encouraged to cry unto Him for peace in the nation, and that He would put an end to these woeful times of destruction, misery, and war under which many of our brethren have suffered and bled.

Indeed, those who understand or have ever felt the work of God in making peace between His majesty and their souls are those who have such an interest in God that, if any people shall prevail with Him for peace in the land, it must be these. They will prove to be our peacemakers in the end, despite people at present crying out against them as if they were the means and instruments of causing the greatest debate, as if they were the enemies of peace. No, my brethren, those who have experienced this great work of God in making peace between Himself and their souls are the ones at the throne of grace, continually crying to Him, who is the Prince of Peace, to make peace in the land.

We desire peace. But you may say, "How can it be done in this way?" Why should we ask how, when God Himself has made peace between heaven and earth? We see things so complex that we do not understand how it could be done, and we wonder how it could ever be brought about, that the spirits of men, being so set against one another, could ever find reconciliation. But God has ways, in His infinite wisdom, that we cannot comprehend. The spirits of any of our adversaries are not so desperately bent against us as we were by nature against God. If, therefore, God could find a way when we were

such enemies to Him to make peace between us and Himself, then God likewise has a way to make a true, settled, and lasting peace between our adversaries and us.

We should desire that, as God has made our peace with Him firm and sure, so the peace that God makes in this land may be somewhat like that peace He has made between heaven and earth. There is a firm peace made between God and us, a peace on which we may rest and confide. A peace between our adversaries and us, as things stand now, cannot be counted as secure; you cannot be certain of your lives even one night after it is established, given the current state of affairs. But we must desire that such a peace may be made as there is between God and us—sure, firm, and stable.

Therefore, pray much, and believe as much as you are able. And though things have reached such a strait that there seems to be no likelihood in the minds of men of how it should be done, they are not brought to as great a strait as things were between God and us before He reconciled Himself to us. And more was required to make up that reconciliation between God and us than could ever be needed between us and our adversaries.

And what was it that made our peace first with God? God was in Christ reconciling the world; it was the blood of His Son that saved our blood. Therefore, let all those who are godly go to this God of peace, not only crying to Him in prayer to make a true and firm peace among us but also presenting to Him the blood of His Son for that purpose. Say, "O Lord, You who sent Your Son into the world to make peace between our souls and You, look upon that blood, and let that blood prevail with You to make peace in England, that no more of the precious blood of Your saints may be spilled and shed among us."

This is the way to obtain peace. And certainly, if the blood of Christ was able to make such a peace between us and God that is firm and lasting, it will also be able to make peace in this poor nation, a peace that will be firm and lasting too.

Thus, we are encouraged regarding our external condition, in regard to the peace of our land, that seeing God has done the greater work, He is able to do the lesser. Seeing that God has reconciled mercy and justice together and made peace between heaven and earth when the breach was so great that all the men in the world and the angels in heaven could not find a way to resolve the difference and mend that breach, yet He has done it. Surely, He can also resolve the differences and mend the breach that is among us.

Chapter 24

Use 5: Those Who Have Assurance of Their Peace with God Should Highly Prize It

Hence, if our reconciliation with God is as it has been explained, and if it has been accomplished in such a manner, then another use we may make of it is this: that all those who have any comforting assurance that their peace is made with God ought to prize it highly and not easily or lightly lose the assurance of it.

Why? Because it has cost as much as it has, and it has been wrought for them in such a strange and wonderful way as it has been—the greatest work that God has ever performed, where His wisdom,

goodness, and power have been displayed. Now, that which God has set Himself to work so powerfully upon to accomplish, and that which has cost so dearly, containing so much of the mystery of godliness—surely, if we have obtained the assurance of it in ourselves, we should highly value it. We should seek to preserve it and not lose it carelessly or without regard.

I recall that when we discussed the excellence of our reconciliation with God and the admirable fruits that flow from it, we had a similar use mentioned: because it is so excellent, we should preserve it and not let it go lightly. But now, this use is drawn from the way of reconciliation, that it is a reconciliation in Christ. Indeed, the argument bears more strongly upon us here than it did before. Previously, the argument was that we should prize it because of the comfort we find in our reconciliation—because of the admirable fruits that flow from it, because it is able to carry us through all the troubles of the world. But now, we must seek to preserve it because we have it in Christ; because it is something that cost more than ten thousand worlds are worth, because God has worked so wonderfully to bring it about.

Has God, therefore, spoken peace to any of your souls? Take heed that you do not turn again to folly. As Psalm 85:8 says: "I will hear what the Lord will say, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints; but let them not return again to folly."

Have you gained any comforting persuasion that the Lord is reconciled to you in Christ, and has God made you aware that reconciliation with Him was a difficult work? Perhaps it cost you many tears, prayers, and much trouble before you could attain it; perhaps you spent a long time seeking it in a legalistic way, crying out to God for His mercy to pardon your sins, and seeking Him in

that natural way. But at that time, you could not have peace spoken to your heart. In time, however, the Lord opened the mystery of Christ to your soul, and then you sought reconciliation with Him in Christ, and you realised that it was through His blood that your peace was made.

Have you found peace in an evangelical way through Christ? Then treasure it. It is a precious jewel because it has come to you in such a manner as this; it cost God dearly, and it may have cost you dearly. But whether it cost you dearly or not, you can be sure it cost God dearly; therefore, treasure it and do not lose it. To lose it entirely, so that God becomes your enemy again, you cannot do; but you can lose it in your perception, and you may lose the comforting assurance of it.

There are two ways in which Christians may lose the comforting assurance of their peace with God: first, through the weakness of their faith; secondly, through the sinfulness of their lives.

Chapter 25

Christians May Lose the Assurance of Their Peace with God Through the Weakness of Their Faith

1. Weakness: When they think the sin they fall into immediately causes enmity between God and them.
   Objection: What need have believers, then, to be careful to avoid sin? **Answered.**

2. Weakness: Judging God's works as enmity against them.

Firstly, Through the Weakness of Their Faith; and That in Two Ways

Weakness 1:
When, through their weakness, they think that the sin they fall into, or are overtaken by, immediately causes enmity between God and them. I have no doubt that there are many souls to whom God is reconciled and who sometimes have had some comfort in the assurance of this reconciliation. Yet, if at any time they are overcome by the sinful distempers of their hearts, they immediately think that this creates enmity between God and them again. They begin to see God as their enemy and think that all the peace is broken between them and God. They feel that this breach undoes all that God has done, and now they think God is against them in all His ways, acting contrary to them as if He were their enemy.

It's true that carnal hearts, which do not understand the difficulty of making peace with God or the breach that sin creates between God and the soul, can sin repeatedly and still think that God will be merciful to them, never considering their sin as enmity against God or seeing God as their enemy. But take a poor soul that understands what sin is and has experienced how hard it is to make peace between God and themselves. As soon as any sin overcomes such a soul, the daily weaknesses often lead them to think that God has become an enemy to them. And however much hope they had before, they now believe that the breach between them and God is as wide, if not wider, than it ever was.

By this, know that you greatly dishonour the mighty work of God in Christ concerning reconciliation. Surely, it is one of the greatest dishonours you can cast upon Christ. When He has come to make

reconciliation between God and you, when He has undertaken it and done it so thoroughly, even at the cost of His own life, you still view this reconciliation as fragile, thinking that with every offence, all is undone again. This would indeed be a very poor reconciliation.

Suppose there were two people who were at odds with each other, and a great breach had been made between them. Another person comes and reconciles them, but only so that one keeps watch over the other to take advantage of any slight offence, returning them to being as great enemies as before. This would be a poor reconciliation indeed. So, when you think that with every sin you commit—after having had your peace made with God—you return to the same state as before, even though you can sincerely appeal to God that the greatest burden in the world to you is that you sin against Him, and you would consider it the greatest mercy to be delivered from that body of sin, what a dishonour you cast upon Christ! What sort of reconciliation has Christ made for you?

O! Therefore, believe that Christ has made a different kind of peace with God, and know that it is not a peace that can be so easily broken. If a bone-setter were to set a broken or disjointed bone in your body, and it was set right for the moment but would slip out of joint again with the slightest movement, you would conclude that this bone-setter was unskilled. Christ came down from Heaven for this very purpose—that He might unite us with God, making us one with Him. Do you think that Christ has merely set us together in such a way that with every daily infirmity, we would be estranged from God again? No, certainly, He has joined us together more strongly than we ever were before.

Adam, in his innocence, when he was without sin, did not have such a strong peace with God as you have in the midst of your sins. This is

a truth; and although we cannot speak of such things without trembling, knowing how ready carnal hearts are to misuse them, it remains true. Therefore, I would have Christians see it this way: to view the reconciliation that has been made between God and themselves as a peace firmer than it ever was between Adam and God, even though Adam had no sin and they have many. This is because Adam did not have it in Christ. So, consider this reconciliation as one that Christ has accomplished, and thereby honour and sanctify God in it.

If it were indeed no other reconciliation than what you obtained through your own prayers or tears, then you might fear that this reconciliation could be broken upon your renewal of sin. In truth, this is why those with enlightened consciences are so full of fears and doubts. Those who lack enlightenment are without fear, but the others are full of doubts and fears, precisely because the peace they have is no more than what they have obtained by their prayers, their duties, their tears, and their good intentions. They have never brought Christ into it; they have never been acquainted with that great mystery of godliness.

Now, the peace with God that you have obtained in any way other than through God's revelation of His work of reconciling Himself to the world in Christ will never last long. You will be inclined, with every temptation, suggestion, or new sin committed, to call that peace into question. But if you have been rooted in Christ, and your peace is grounded upon that which surpasses all your duties, tears, and prayers, and you can look upon God as reconciled to you in Christ, this peace will hold. This peace may endure despite the abundance of sins that remain in the soul of one reconciled to God.

Therefore, to aid you, so that you may not question your reconciliation with God upon every sin, know this: being reconciled to God, you are not under the Law such that every sin against the Law should place you under the sentence of eternal death. You are not under the curse that threatens everlasting death for those who sin. Here is the difference between one who is reconciled to God and another who is not. One who is not reconciled to God in Christ is so under the Law that every sin they commit, whether little or great, places them under the sentence and curse of eternal death; the neglect of any duty, however small, does it.

But now, here is the privilege of a believer: when you are once a believer and thus in Jesus Christ, then the sins you commit should indeed humble you, but none of them place you under the sentence of eternal death. Neither are you to obey the Law on the basis that every breach would place you under such a sentence. Others who are under the Law must look to keep it, whether they are able to or not, but the Law has no power over you in that way, and you are not bound to keep it on that basis. Therefore, the sins you commit do not place you under the sentence of eternal death as they do for others.

"There is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ," and this is true at every moment and instant of time. I will provide another scripture for this, which is just as clear, although perhaps not as often noticed: it is in Romans 7:5: "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sin, which were by the Law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." Note this: the motions of sin, which were by the Law, did work in our members; what did they do? They brought forth fruit—fruit unto death. This, the blessed Apostle says, was when we were in the flesh. But now, being believers, though we still have the remnants and motions of sin, they are not such as to bring forth fruit unto death. None of the sins of

believers bring forth fruit unto death, for they are delivered from the power of the Law, and the Law cannot bring the sentence of death upon them.

This is a high privilege of believers, and a proper understanding of this would help us not to think that our peace with God is so fragile that He becomes our enemy with every sin committed through human frailty.

Objection: You may say, "What need then for believers to be careful to avoid sin? Can they not take the liberty to walk as they please?"

Oh, no; there are other arguments besides this. Indeed, if they had a slavish spirit, if they had no other arguments to persuade them away from sin but this—that sin would make God and them enemies—it would mean something. Those who object and say that believers may do as they please because their peace with God cannot be broken truly have slavish hearts themselves; they do not understand the strength of other arguments that keep them from sin.

I dare boldly affirm this: a believer should not, upon the commission of sin, think that they are now under the sentence of death, provided it is such a sin that may be consistent with a state of grace, as many weaknesses and frailties might be. For there are certain sins, such as living after the flesh, which the Scripture speaks of, where, if believers live in them, they shall die. You may ask, "What, can they perish eternally?" While this is presented as a means to keep them from living after the flesh, should they ever live in such a way (which God's grace will keep them from doing consistently), they shall die. To that extent, they may apprehend that eternal death would be due to them if it were possible for them to fall into such a state. But it is not true that a believer, upon every sin committed, is under the

sentence of death; for once they are believers, they are freed from the Law.

Therefore, the Apostle, after speaking of the Law of God for this same purpose in Romans 5, addresses this objection: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid: how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" And then it follows: "Even as sin hath reigned unto death, so grace must reign through righteousness to eternal life." The grace of God reigns, it dominates over all things that come to oppose it, even over all our infirmities, over all our sins, and over whatsoever might seem to contradict it. The grace of God reigns; there is a dominating power in the grace of God over all things that would contradict it, but this is through righteousness.

You have sin within you that might oppose God's reconciling grace, but grace reigns despite that sin of yours, and it reigns unto eternal life. It has a reigning power to carry you through all difficulties and hindrances to eternal life, and all this is through the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, believers, in order to maintain their peace with God, are to regard all duties required by the Law as obligations; they are not freed from the duties that the Law requires. Their relationship to God as their Redeemer does not remove their relationship to God as Creator; still, they are bound to God as Creator as well as Redeemer. However, they should view the Law as coming to them in the hand of Christ.

Luther's statement on this is excellent: "Oh, how sweet," he says, "are the commandments of God to us when we receive them not as they are in the Book, but as they are in the wounds of Christ. When we read the commandments of God in the wounds of Christ and receive them there, oh, how sweet are they then!" Then we obey them from

sweet principles, not from legal considerations, as if every breach would bring us under the sentence of eternal death, as we did before.

This, I believe, is the meaning of Romans 8:15: "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." What is the spirit of bondage? The spirit of bondage that causes fear at first, before one becomes a believer, is this: "Either perfectly obey the Law or perish," says the spirit, even the Spirit of God, whether you are able or not; you must obey everything or die. If you have sinned against the Law, you are now accursed despite all your duties. The Spirit of God says this to all unbelievers, and it causes fear. But, as the Apostle says, "You have not received the spirit of bondage to fear again." Though you might fear due to your weakness, thinking that God will turn against you upon every breach, the Spirit of God does not say you are therefore accursed. Rather, that Spirit enables you to go to God as a Father, to heal your weaknesses, and to give you strength against them.

The contrary belief is a significant misunderstanding and dishonour to the work of God's reconciliation in Christ. We must place much emphasis on this great work, which God values so highly, and if we did, we might walk through the world with immense comfort, and it would increase our sanctification.

Indeed, to deny all kinds of obligations to the Law and say that men are not bound to keep it as God being their Creator, and so forth, is an extreme vanity. But to grant the Law what it deserves and to grant the believer their due as well, to show how far we are bound to it and how far we are delivered from it, this is a great mystery of the Gospel. People should labour to understand it correctly and take heed, lest, in a desire to grasp the grace of God in Christ, we do not go too far in overthrowing our obligations to God by the Law.

One might think that what I have stated (if people were not so inclined to be wanton) would be enough—that we are not under the sentence of condemnation, though we are not freed from the Law and its duties as God is our Creator. We should consider the grace of God magnified in this, and therefore, take hold of and make use of this grace of God in Christ so as not to lose the comfort of it.

This is the first weakness that prevents people from maintaining the comfortable assurance of their peace with God.

Weakness 2.

The second weakness is this: When godly people are inclined to interpret God's works, due to their weakness, as acts of enmity against them—not only viewing their own ways towards God as evidence that God and they are at enmity, but also interpreting all aspects of God's providence as if He were acting as an enemy towards them. They see God as walking contrary to them. This is a great weakness and dishonour to God. Let the wicked and ungodly judge this way if they will. As God says, "Fury is not in me; who would set the briars and thorns before him? He will go through them." When God approaches in outward ways of suffering, the ungodly may see these as God acting contrary to them. They may view all His works as the actions of an enemy who intends their ruin and destruction. They might interpret every trouble, even the smallest illness, as the beginnings of eternal wrath and a path toward eternal misery, as far as they know.

However, for those who are reconciled to God, it is their weakness if they view even the greatest affliction they face as God coming towards them as an enemy. No, you must understand that your reconciliation with God in Christ carries this power:

Firstly, there is nothing that God does towards you that leads to everlasting wrath—nothing, whatever it may be. Here is your comfort, and you may build upon this: even if your affliction is severe, and even if it lingers upon your body or your possessions, perhaps you lose all you have, and it may be that God hands you over to your enemies, and they trample upon you as dirt; yet none of this leads to eternal wrath. On the other hand, although a wicked person might receive many favours from God and experience His patience, no wicked person has grounds to interpret any blessing they enjoy from God as something that leads to their eternal good.

Similarly, those who are believers, no matter how great their afflictions, do not have sufficient grounds to interpret these afflictions as leading to their ultimate destruction. One might think that this would be sufficient for believers to trust that whatever afflictions they face in this world, the wrath of God in all those afflictions has been removed; they shall not lead to their ruin and eternal misery. Even though the afflictions themselves may persist, the poison in every affliction—the wrath of God—has been removed by Christ. Indeed, whatever happens to us in this world is, through the love of God, working towards our good. That which appears most opposed to your desires is, in reality, intended for your everlasting good in Christ. One would think that this understanding should be sufficient to bring satisfaction to our hearts regarding afflictions.

Just as what was previously stated should be enough concerning our freedom from the Law, what I have now written should suffice regarding our being chastened for our sins.

Consider just these two points: that no evil or chastisement that befalls us will lead to our everlasting misery; and, moreover, that nothing will happen to us but what comes from love and works

towards our eternal good. If these two truths are accepted, one would think we could concede anything else: that God may display fatherly displeasure against us for our sins, though not as a vengeful judge; that God may exercise His wisdom in this way to manifest His holiness and to show how He dislikes sin, and so on. One would think that this could be granted, provided the first two truths are established.

Indeed, these two truths, along with the earlier point about the Law, are granted by all our orthodox divines, and they are sufficient to reassure us of the free grace of God in Christ. If believers are thoroughly rooted and grounded in this, they may maintain the assurance of their peace with God. For what shall hinder them? Neither their sins nor God's afflictions. Neither of these should disturb a believer's peace; rather, they should be able to preserve it, looking upon God through Christ.

This concludes the matter of losing the assurance of our peace through weakness.

Chapter 26.

We May Lose the Assurance of Our Peace with God Through Our Sinful Walk.

Secondly, we may come to lose our peace—the assurance of our peace with God—through sinfulness, through our loose and carnal walking with God. By this means, we may begin to fear that such

walking cannot be consistent with the condition of a believer; and then, indeed, a believer is brought to a standstill, and it may be a long time before he can find peace again.

In cases of daily infirmity, when he strives against it, he may be easily reassured. But when his conduct becomes akin to walking after the flesh, as indeed many fall so grievously that you can scarcely distinguish between one walking after the flesh and him, it greatly obscures the light of God's favour and significantly hinders the comfort of his peace with God.

And oh, how justly may the Lord reproach you, saying, "Did I set my infinite wisdom to work to find such a way of reconciliation with you? And is it worth so little to you that you cast aside its comfort, allowing yourself liberty to indulge in looseness and negligence, to satisfy the desires of the flesh?"

Christ himself might rebuke you, saying, "What? Shall I come from the bosom of my Father, take upon me the form of a servant, and be made a curse, that I might make peace between my Father and you—and is it worth no more than this, that you would cast away the comfort of your assurance for some sinful inclination of heart, to grant yourself liberty to live after the flesh?"

Indeed, the Holy Spirit may confront you, saying, "What? Shall I come and reveal the deep counsels of God towards you, showing you what those things were that God, from all eternity, has done for you? Shall I open the mysteries of Christ to you, draw your heart to him, and speak peace to you, and yet, after all is done, you would value this so little as to lose that which I have brought to you, just to satisfy some base desire of your heart? Would you lose the comfort of all that I have done for you?"

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may rebuke your negligence and the looseness of your heart and life. Yes, and your own conscience may accuse you, saying, “Did I not often warn you that if you allowed yourself to walk loosely, you would lose your comfort, and you would begin to see God as a terror? And will you, in these days of trouble, when men cry out in fear and danger, take such a foolish course to lose your peace with God? Is there anything in the base inclination of your heart that could compensate for this loss?”

Look upon those who walk holily and closely with God, and let their lives rebuke you. They keep their hearts pure and maintain their peace with God, and when they lie down, they lie down in peace, and when they awake, they do so with the comfortable assurance of their peace. When they hear of wars and rumours of wars, so long as they can look up to God as their reconciled Father, their hearts remain firm and stable. Though they suffer the loss of their possessions and all that is dear to them, they know that within their hearts, there is enough to provide them with comfort.

Yet you, in giving in to some base and sinful desire or lust, cannot think of God without terror; you can only see him as an enemy. Oh, unworthy soul, how should you be confounded in your own thoughts for the looseness and negligence of heart in preserving that peace which Christ has wrought between the Father and you, so strangely and wonderfully!

Let these things, my brethren, work upon your hearts, and ground everything on this: that we are reconciled to God in Christ. Our reconciliation was achieved in such a marvellous way through Christ, and it cost his blood to secure it. Therefore, if we have any hope of our peace with God, we must be diligent in preserving it.

Chapter 27.

Use 6: Give God the Glory for Our Reconciliation.

Again, we have yet a further application here. If God is reconciled to us in Christ, it teaches us to give God the glory for this great work; to adore the infinite wisdom, mercy, and goodness of God in reconciling us to himself through Jesus Christ.

When Christ was born, the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth," and it was on this basis that they sang it. It was as if they were saying, "O Lord, what a way you have made to bring peace upon earth, that you should send your Son! Here we look upon a poor infant in a manger, and this infant is the eternal God, the second person in the Trinity, who has taken on human nature, and here he lies in the cradle; even the same person who made the world. What a strange work of God this is, to bring peace upon earth in such a way! Glory be to God on high!"

And this is what we should spend our days doing: adoring the infinite wisdom and goodness of God in his way of reconciling the world to himself in Christ. God expects that all the children of men, to whom Christ is made known, should fall on their faces and spend their days adoring, praising, and magnifying this great work of God.

God expects that we should have exceedingly high thoughts of this work, and if our thoughts are not elevated above all other creatures, we merely take the name of God in vain. God does not care for any other glory we give him unless we give him glory for this work. It is true that when we see the works of God in the earth and in the seas,

we should glorify God's power and wisdom, but unless your heart is captivated by this masterpiece—this great work of God in reconciling himself to the world in Christ—God will reject all your other acts of glorifying him. I mean he will reject them in such a way that he will not accept them by comparison. Therefore, this is the thing that God accepts above all; this is the commandment of God: that we should believe in his Son and give the Father the glory due to him for reconciling himself to the world through his Son.

This is the work that shall be done in heaven for all eternity. This is the thing that God himself delights in above all else he has done; it captures his heart more than anything else. If it does not capture your heart, but instead you regard it as an ordinary thing and thus treat the blood of Christ as something common, know that this is a great insult to the very matter in which God expects the most glory.

Let me say this: Has God revealed this work of his Son to you? Is your heart captivated by this great work that God has done, and do you find yourself continually adoring the greatness of this work of God? If so, peace be unto you; for this is as good an evidence that you are reconciled to God in Christ as any that I know. But I must hasten.

Chapter 28.

Use 7: To Love Christ and Do or Suffer for Him.

Again, is it in Christ that we are reconciled to God? O! Let Christ be beloved by us. Let us say, with the blessed martyr Lambert, "None

but Christ, None but Christ," which he spoke when he came to the stake to be burnt for Christ. This is a good lesson for us, especially when we may be called to suffer very hard things for what we have undertaken to do in obedience to God. Yet, we should rejoice when we come to suffer banishment, loss of goods, or even loss of life, and to be glad that our hearts were ever engaged in the ways of God. This is indeed a sign of grace.

Many people can continue with joy when things prosper, but if they find that their efforts do not meet with outward success, or that there are many setbacks, they regret what they have done. This is the reason why so many people run away now, withdrawing themselves from what they once would have spent their lives and dearest blood on. Not only do they withdraw when they see the situation growing difficult, but they even betray the cause. But here lies a true test of godliness: that if I have engaged myself in the ways of God, and God, through his providence, casts me into paths that bring trouble, yet I can rejoice that I was ever engaged in them.

Such was the case with the blessed martyr who cried, "None but Christ," even when he stood at the stake for Christ. A carnal heart might say, "Yes, Lambert, before you rejoiced in Christ and spoke of him, but what do you say now that you are about to be burnt for him? Had you kept Christ to yourself, you might have preserved this body of yours." But no, Christ was still sweet to this man, even as he went to suffer for him, and even then, he declared, "None but Christ."

Indeed, there is cause sufficient for Christ to be dear and sweet to us even amidst all sufferings. It is true that this may cause the world to become our enemy, but what of that, when Christ has made peace between us and God the Father? This satisfies the soul entirely, and therefore, the soul will love him, rejoice in him, and bless God that it

was ever engaged in any cause for Christ's sake. Because Christ is our blessed Reconciler, and because he has made peace between God and our hearts, even though men may be our enemies, we know that through Christ, God is our friend.

Christ has made men our enemies, indeed, but only incidentally. He has made God our friend, and he himself said, "Do you think I came to bring peace? No, I came to bring a sword." Through the profession of the Gospel, there is a great deal of enmity among men. I believe that this rage and enmity rooted here in England, Christ himself is the accidental cause of it. On one side, there is a desire among God's people for a thorough Reformation; on the other side, there is hatred in the hearts of men against Christ and his ordinances. They would rather undo themselves than allow Christ to have any glory. They would sooner place themselves under an antichristian yoke, even a yoke of slavery, making themselves and their posterity slaves, than be under the yoke of Christ. This is the root of the bitter malice and rage now present in men's hearts. There was never an example of a people who were so enraged against each other for their own minds.

We might have peace and liberty if we would unite as one man against the papists and others who are notoriously and abominably wicked to subdue them. But because that peace and liberty would bring in reformation, and men would no longer have the liberty for their lusts as they did before, they would rather have no peace at all. They would prefer to be slaves to the wills and lusts of men, and to the devil, than to come under Christ's yoke. Thus, the Gospel is, in great part, the cause of the sword, by accident.

What then? Shall we not therefore love Christ? Shall we say, "Since there has been so much preaching and profession, we have had such wars, strifes, and troubles, and that if people would be quiet and

contented, they could have peace?" O! What is this but to be content to be without Christ, without truth, without peace of conscience? Simply because we desire these—Christ, the Gospel, truth, and peace of conscience—we find ourselves without peace with men. Yet, blessed be God for Christ, for although he is as a bundle of myrrh that has much bitterness in it, let him lie between your breasts. Let us rejoice in him, let us love him, let us bless God for him, and be glad that we were ever engaged in his cause.

O! That great peace-maker between God and us, how dear should he be to our hearts! As that martyr said when he was about to suffer for him, "What have I but one life to lay down for Christ? O! That I had many." So should we say, "What, is our life in danger for Christ? O! That we had many lives that might all be in danger for him."

I heard a credible account of a young man involved in the business in Kent, who was shot through the shoulder and fell as if dead, lying as dead for a while. But recovering and gaining strength to discharge a musket, he said, "Well, I will spend one life more for this cause." The truth is, had we one, yes, a hundred, a thousand lives, we might very well expend them in a cause where we might testify our love to Christ, and bless God that we were ever engaged in it, even though it has brought such disturbances among men.

And let this be one way in which you manifest your love for Jesus Christ as the great Reconciler—by being willing to be reconciled with your brethren for his sake. This is one good way to show your love for Christ. Perhaps there are those who have wronged you, and there is a great breach between you and your neighbour. A natural person might be willing to reconcile on natural grounds; it is a troublesome thing to be in contention, and it is more comfortable to be at peace with one's neighbour. And so, through a natural love for peace, some

will be content to reconcile with others with whom they have fallen out, and it is good to go that far.

But when you can bring yourself to this—not only out of love for peace because it is good for neighbours to be reconciled—but when you think, "Christ has reconciled my soul when I was an enemy to God; he came down from the bosom of his Father and laid down his life for me; and Christ is dishonoured when there are such breaches between friend and friend." Therefore, out of love for Jesus Christ, who has reconciled my soul to the Father, I am willing, from that very principle, to be at peace with others.

Chapter 29.

Use 8: In Seeking Reconciliation through Christ.

Lastly, if it is in Christ that we are reconciled to God, let us all learn, in seeking reconciliation, to fix our eyes on Christ and carry him in our hearts. If any of you are now beginning to feel your consciences stirred and are becoming aware of the breach between God and yourselves, do not rest in seeking peace in a natural way, but turn your eyes to Jesus Christ. When you look up to God for peace, look to him through Christ.

See Christ as the second person of the Trinity, taking our nature upon himself. Consider Christ as the head of the Covenant of Grace. View Christ as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, who

has made peace with his blood. Look upon Christ as sitting at the right hand of the Father, making intercession.

This is how you should exercise your faith in God through Christ when you are seeking peace with God. The reason why many people lie under a spirit of bondage for many years is that they look upon God merely as he is in himself and do not look upon God through Christ. Therefore, they fail to sanctify the name of God in this great work of reconciliation.

Chapter 30

God [was] Reconciling the World to Himself from All Eternity, Explained

And thus we have completed the point of God's being reconciled to us in Christ. There is another aspect; namely, the sixth matter proposed in the first chapter, which is that God [was] reconciling the world to himself in his Son. The work of our reconciliation is not a recent matter; it is a work that God has been engaged in from all eternity. This is emphasised by the phrase that he [was] doing this work; for God to reconcile us to himself in his Son has occupied the heart of God from all eternity.

The passage in Titus 1:2 is most remarkable for this: "In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began." He did not only promise it now but promised it before the

world began. Who was there before the world began to whom God made this promise? It was his Son, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the meaning is that when it says God [was] reconciling himself to the world, it implies that there was, from all eternity, a transaction between God the Father and God the Son concerning our reconciliation. There was not merely an intention from eternity that he would reconcile the world to himself, but there was an actual transaction, an agreement between God the Father and God the Son about it.

Firstly, God's wisdom was exercised from all eternity to find a way. Secondly, God's purpose was from all eternity to accomplish it. Thirdly, there was a transaction between God the Father and God the Son from all eternity to achieve it; they covenanted with one another. God the Father told his Son what he required of him, and God the Son promised to fulfil it. This is why Scripture says it was promised before the world began. God the Father promised his Son what he would do for those for whom he would die. It is as if he said, "Are you willing to lay down your life and shed your blood?" "Yes," replies the Son. "Well," says the Father, "I will be reconciled to them, and I will save their souls; they shall have eternal life for their portion. This I promise you." Thus, the promise was made to Christ first.

It is true that the promises of the Gospel are sweet and should bring joy to our hearts. As David said, "I had perished in my affliction had I not taken heed of your word." Nothing is sweeter to a soul than the promises, but even though the promises made to us in the Gospel are sweet, the promise made to the Son of God is infinitely sweeter.

What I ought to show you is not only how this promise was made to Christ but also the profound comfort it brings to the saints. They are

to look upon all that is done for them and all the works of God's grace to them not as something new or accidental.

For example, if we were to have peace here in the nation, it would be precious to us, and we would all rejoice greatly at any safe and lasting peace. But our peace with God is not achieved as if we were perishing and then God's providence suddenly turned things around. No, our peace with God was planned from all eternity. God contrived it in heaven before the world was made. God thought of reconciling himself to the world, even to you in particular if you are a believer, a contrite sinner, before the heavens or the earth were made. God had you in mind all along, and there was a covenant between God the Father and the Son concerning your soul in particular.

Although God foresaw that you would sin against him and turn into an enemy, there was a consultation between the Father and the Son from all eternity to bring your soul back to God and to pardon your sin. Therefore, you should see all the works of God's grace towards you in bringing you to his Son, and all the comforts you receive from his Son, as the fruit of God's eternal plan, of God's eternal counsel with his Son. Although it only manifests now, it was in the heart of the Father and the Son from all eternity, and this truly sweetens our reconciliation with God and all the means leading to it.

For example, does God send the word of reconciliation to draw you to Christ? This was part of what was conceived in the heart of God from all eternity—that at a specific time, a certain person would live in a particular place, that a certain minister would be sent among them, and that a particular text of Scripture would be preached, and that God would bring these truths to your soul. Know that this is the fruit of that eternal counsel between the Father and the Son before

the world began, and a branch of the promise that God made to his Son from all eternity.

When you come to the word, and you begin to feel your mind enlightened to know Jesus Christ, when your heart begins to melt, and your soul is drawn towards Christ, do not regard this as a mere accident. Do not merely say, "What a providence of God it was that led me to such a sermon!" Instead, understand that this very work of God towards you is the fruit of the promise that God made to his Son before the world began. God promised his Son that it should be arranged that at such a time there would be such a text and sermon, and that you would be there.

Likewise, any peace of conscience or work of grace whatsoever is a fruit of this promise. Therefore, rejoice in this: that God's heart has been opened to you, and that which was in his heart from all eternity is now made known to you.

Those men who are not converted until they are old have cause to be sorrowful and troubled about it. It is true that I have cause to bless God that, at last, He has been pleased to open His heart to me. But what a misery it is that I lived so long before I came to know God the Father's purpose for my heart! Had I embraced the Gospel earlier, I would have been made acquainted with God's counsel concerning me from all eternity.

It is a great encouragement for young people to bless God for beginning His work in them early; it is a sign that God's heart is full when He starts with someone at a young age. For the truth is, God's heart has been set on you from everlasting, and His purposes have been unfolding from eternity. With some, although God's heart is inclined toward them, He keeps it hidden for a long time, only

breaking it open when they reach middle age or even old age. Then, at length, He reveals Himself.

Just as Joseph did not reveal his heart to his brothers for many days, there are many people whom God allows to continue for a long time in the ways of sin. He withholds Himself and refrains from revealing His heart to them, but eventually, He does. However, how much better it is when God opens His heart to a person early on! Would not Joseph's brothers have been glad if he had revealed himself to them and opened his heart at their first meeting?

So, for those of you who are beginning to experience the day of grace dawning in your understanding, and for whom God is revealing Himself early, showing you those things that were in His heart before the world's beginning—rejoice! It is as if God cannot, so to speak with reverence, wait any longer. As soon as you are able to comprehend the thoughts of God's heart, He reveals them to you. O! Bless God for this. It will prevent much sin and sorrow and allow you to walk in comfort all your days.

This truth should also be a tremendous comfort to God's people: their peace with God does not rest so much on the covenant that God has made with them but rather on the covenant that God made with Jesus Christ from all eternity. That is the root and foundation of their peace and reconciliation with God. Alas, if it depended on the covenant between us and God and what He requires of us, we could not have firm peace. But when we know that the root and ground of our peace and happiness rest upon that transaction that took place between the Father and the Son from all eternity, and upon the covenant made between them, O! This should bring great joy to the hearts of the saints. It should be a mighty foundation of their faith,

enabling them to go through the world and face all difficulties with comfort.

Chapter 31

The Work of Our Reconciliation with God in Christ Has Been in Progress from All Eternity

In the last chapter, we arrived at the sixth point that was formerly propounded in the first chapter, which is this: that God *was* reconciling Himself to the world in Christ. *Was*—and when was He? Even from all eternity, He was reconciling Himself to the world. I mentioned this point before and will now expand upon it before moving on.

Doctrine: The work of our reconciliation with God in Christ is not a recent matter; it is a work that has been in progress from all eternity. It is not something that has occurred accidentally, but a matter that has been planned and plotted from all eternity.

I previously cited only one scripture to support this, but I will add more now and explain it more fully. The scripture I gave was Titus 1:2: *In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began.* Now, to whom did God make this promise before the world began? The first promise we read of was made to Adam in Paradise: *The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head.* However, there was a promise beyond that promise—one made before Adam existed, before the angels, or before the world began; a

promise of eternal life, which is the fulfilment of our reconciliation with God. This promise could only have been made to the Son of God, who was with the Father, and who was the Father's delight—not just the delight of the Father as the Son eternally begotten, but as the One who undertook the great work of reconciliation between God and us. This promise was made to Him by the Father; the promise of reconciliation and eternal life before the world began.

Therefore, that scripture shows that from all eternity, there was not only a purpose or determination in God to reconcile us to Himself, but also an agreement and transaction between the Father and the Son about it, and a covenant made between them. God the Father promised something, and the Son promised something, and thus they made an agreement with each other from all eternity.

Firstly, there was a transaction of this great work of reconciliation between God the Father and the Son from all eternity. I will give you another couple of scriptures to support this.

2 Timothy 1:9: *Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began.* Here, we find not only a purpose but also grace besides purpose. There was not just an intention in God before the world began; there was something more—there was purpose and grace, and this was given to us as well. It was not only intended for us (note this point), but it was given to us, and it was given to us before the world began. But how could it be given to us before we existed? Therefore, it adds that it was His purpose and grace, *given to us in Christ* before the world began.

As it is possible for an inheritance to be made over to someone before they are born (for sometimes, between man and man, something is

made over "to our heirs lawfully begotten," even if they are not yet born), so it is with Christ. There is a legal arrangement in such cases. Perhaps something is given to someone to hold in trust, so that if certain individuals are born, they shall benefit from it. In a similar way, Jesus Christ stood before the Father (if we may speak in such a manner) as a trustee, as the head of a covenant, and there were transactions between the Father and Him. There was not just a purpose in God to reconcile Himself to us, but grace was given to us in Christ; there was an actual bestowal of this upon Christ before the world began so that we might come to enjoy it.

Another scripture that speaks to this is 1 Corinthians 2:7: *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world to our glory*. Here, the Apostle does not only speak of God's electing or ordaining us to glory, but he speaks of the entire mystery of the Gospel, which he calls the hidden wisdom of God. This doctrine of reconciliation—that we are reconciled to God in Christ—is the hidden wisdom of God, which was kept secret from the beginning of the world and yet was ordained before the world began for our glory. God had already planned out all this doctrine of reconciliation and had purposed that, in time, it would be revealed to us, just as it is now.

There is yet another scripture for this which is very remarkable. It is in John 17. You will find in that chapter many expressions to that purpose, indicating that those who believed in Christ were given to Him by God the Father. By various expressions there, it is clear that there was an agreement, a transaction between the Father and the Son long before the actual event took place.

In verse 16, Christ says: *"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours, You gave*

them to Me, and they have kept Your word." He does not speak merely of giving them to Him at that moment, but of giving them to the Son before that time, for He makes that the basis of their belief. He does not present the Father's giving of them to the Son as a result of their believing; rather, He shows that their believing and keeping the word of faith are fruits of God's giving them to His Son. The Father's giving them to His Son is the foundation of their believing, and hence, in time, they come to believe because God the Father had, from all eternity, given them to His Son. That is Christ's argument.

This indeed makes the difference between some who believe and others who do not. There are some with limited abilities—poor people, and young ones—who believe in Jesus Christ and the great mysteries of the Gospel; yet others who are more knowledgeable, even learned men, do not believe. The difference is this: God the Father gives some to His Son to reconcile, and He does not give others. This is the argument Christ makes in John 17, where He establishes that the foundation of their faith is the Father's act of giving them to the Son.

Therefore, it is evident in scripture that before we come to believe, even before the world was created, there was a transaction between the Father and the Son about our reconciliation. God was reconciling Himself to the world.

Our reconciliation with God and the non-imputation of our sins must therefore be considered across three periods of time:

1. **Firstly** (if we may call this a period of time, which, in fact, was before time itself), it existed from all eternity with the Son. Here, God was reconciling Himself to us.

2. **Secondly**, when Christ came into the world, was upon the cross, and suffered, there was an actual imputation of the sins of all the elect unto Him, a laying of those sins upon Christ. There was a special act of God, imputing and charging the sins of all the elect to His Son.

3. **Thirdly**, when God calls any sinner to believe, there is another act of God passing the sentence of absolution upon the soul—an actual pronouncement, which we call justification.

To illustrate, in legal matters between man and man, the law may be satisfied for a prisoner, and yet the prisoner is not absolved. The prisoner is not acquitted until the judge solemnly pronounces the sentence, even though a verdict of "not guilty" may have been delivered. Similarly, though Jesus Christ, in His sufferings and crucifixion, satisfied the law for all who would believe in Him, there still needs to be the pronouncement of the sentence by the judge to confirm their acquittal—this is our justification.

Yet, even after the sentence is pronounced, we know that a convict might still remain in prison until the fees are paid. Just so with us: after our justification, we remain in this world, still burdened by the chains of our corrupt nature and afflictions, until we have fulfilled our earthly obligations and the providential workings of God.

One who is elect but not yet a believer is like a prisoner for whom the law has been satisfied, even though he does not know it. Yet, assuredly, he shall be saved. An elect person who is a believer is like a prisoner who has had the judge pronounce the sentence of absolution upon him, yet remains in prison until the fees are paid. But those in heaven—they have not only had the law satisfied and the fees paid, but they are set at liberty and dwell in their Father's house.

Therefore, there are different times in which God manifests our reconciliation to us, not imputing our sins to us.

However, even though God's work unfolds in these distinct phases, this does not imply any change in God, which is an objection that many, due to weakness, might raise. They might argue that because God performs these actions now which were not done before, it suggests a change in God, and therefore they might conclude that nothing is done now which was not done eternally, in the same manner.

But we must understand this: God's actual pronouncement of a sentence of absolution now, which was not done before, does not imply any change in God, any more than God's glorification of the saints in heaven now—who were not glorified before—implies a change. To be justified in time does not imply a change in God any more than to be glorified in time implies it. The saints on earth are not yet glorified, even though they shall be, and this does not suggest any change in God. In the same way, the elect who are not yet believers are not justified in the sense that the scripture speaks of justification, though they shall be justified—and this does not imply any change in God.

But that we may further understand how God has been reconciling Himself to the world from all eternity, we must acknowledge that there are several periods of time in which God's actions towards a sinner manifest themselves in different ways, which are indeed implied in the words of the text: "God was reconciling the world to Himself." He *was* doing it, and this work, before it comes to completion, unfolds through various periods of time.

To help you understand this better, you must recognise that there is a great difference between God's actions within Himself, according to

His own nature, and His actions towards the creature in a way that is suitable to the creature. The failure to understand this difference leads many people into serious errors and mistaken conclusions. They infer from God's infinite and incomprehensible way of acting within Himself to the ways in which God's actions are experienced and received by the creature. When they hear about God's workings as received by the creature, they assume these must be understood in the same way as God's actions in Himself. I will now show you how great a difference exists between them.

Firstly, consider the acts of God within Himself. It is true that the act of God is, in fact, His very Being. God's essence and His act in Himself are one and the same. However, the act of God as the creature receives it is not the essence of God, for the creature is incapable of containing God's essence; otherwise, the creature would be infinite. The act of God within Himself is God Himself, and thus it is infinite; there is no act in God that is not infinite, because it is God. What the creature receives, however, cannot be infinite.

Similarly, the acts of God within Himself are eternal, without any distinction of time. There is no past, present, or future with God. When we consider the acts of God within Himself, even the glorification of the saints, as far as it is considered in God, it is eternal, and there is no distinction of time whatsoever. However, if we consider these acts as they are received by the creature, we must acknowledge differences in time—one act at one time, another at another time, as they are received by the creature.

We must be cautious against being overly bold when we speak of God. When God manifests His workings as they are received by the creature, we should not assume that these are the same as the acts of God in Himself, which are infinite and can only be understood in an

infinite manner. Such an understanding is beyond the reach of anything but an infinite intellect. Therefore, those who think they can fathom the acts of God as they are in Himself are far too presumptuous, for only an infinite understanding can fully grasp them.

We must understand these acts as they are received by the creature, in the manner they are revealed in the Word. This is essentially what is revealed concerning God's actions towards us: namely, that from eternity, there was a transaction between God and the Son in a manner beyond our comprehension; that, in time, the Lord laid our sins upon His Son on the cross; and that afterwards, when the appointed time comes to call a sinner to Himself, He justifies that sinner and pronounces a sentence of absolution. But first, He calls them. The scripture says, "those whom He called, He justified." The scripture clearly places the calling of a sinner before justification, therefore, whatever might exist in God from eternity, it is evident that (speaking of justification in the way scripture presents it) vocation precedes justification.

Thus, justification is no more from eternity than vocation. God could as truly be said to call a sinner out of his natural state from eternity as to justify a sinner from eternity, in the sense that the scripture speaks of it in Romans 8. When we ordinarily speak of justification, however, we do so in the sense that the scripture speaks of it here, where vocation is first, followed by justification, and then glorification.

Therefore, though the Lord has been pleased to reveal much of the mystery of the Gospel to us, and tell us that He has been reconciling Himself to us from eternity, we must understand this in a sober way

and be careful not to allow our thoughts to become presumptuous when we seek to look into this profound mystery.

Chapter 32:

Five Uses of the Former Doctrine

A word or two further in applying this (for something has already been covered in the last chapter), and then we shall proceed to another point.

Use 1

Here we see the infinite love of God, that He has been pleased to think of us poor creatures from everlasting, making it His work to reconcile us to Himself. This is the foundation of the sweetness and comfort of all the mercies of God to those who are reconciled unto Him, for they are the fruits of God's eternal love towards us. Likewise, here lies the foundation of the assurance of the saints; their happiness does not depend so much on the covenant that God has made between Himself and them, but rather on the covenant that God has made between Himself and His Son.

For the covenant is twofold: either between God and Christ, or between Christ and us. Now, it is true that much depends upon our keeping covenant with Christ; but our happiness, salvation, and indeed all our good, depend chiefly upon the covenant between the Father and the Son.

Use 2

Again, here we may find an answer to the question posed by some atheists: What was God doing before the world began? I remember it is said that when this question was asked by some in the primitive times, the answer was that God was making hell for such curious inquisitors. But we have a further answer to give: namely, that God was engaged from all eternity in the work of reconciling the world to Himself.

God had, as it were, the idea and the plan of all things before Him. He saw how man was created in his innocence, how he would fall, how he would rise again, and how he would be converted and glorified. The plan for all these things was before God from all eternity.

Just as a workman, when he goes to build a house or a ship, has the design in his mind before he strikes the first blow, so too the great works of our election, vocation, justification, reconciliation, adoption, sanctification, and glorification were all present before God; they were all, as it were, in His mind, and He was engaged with them before the world began.

Therefore, if you are a believer, it is now evident that the Lord has been engaged from all eternity with you, concerning your good and the design of your salvation. He foresaw how you would fall from Him and become a child of wrath, an heir of hell. He also foresaw how to recover you from that condition and how to bring this about—how He would determine your place of dwelling, the time in history in which you would live, an age when the Gospel and its mysteries would be preached. He foresaw that you would come under a particular ministry, and that just during the preaching of a specific sermon, a certain truth would be impressed upon your heart and

applied to you. It was then that He would send His Holy Spirit to fasten that truth upon your heart. The Lord planned all this from eternity, and this is what He was engaged in (as we may speak with reverence) before the world began.

Use 3

Another use is this: it serves as a firm foundation to help us believe in the eternal happiness that is to come, that part of eternity which lies ahead. Because we have God revealing His love to us in that part of eternity which lies behind, He has shown that from eternity He has been planning our good. Surely then, it is no more for God to make us happy on the other side of eternity than it was for Him to plan our happiness in the former part of eternity.

Thus, a believer may see his happy condition in this: he is now enjoying that part of God's love which lies between two oceans of eternity. Imagine there being a little river, and on either side, a mighty ocean of water. Now, the stream of God's love and mercy runs towards you, and you are presently receiving an abundance of good from God. The Lord sweetens your life, comforts, and refreshes your heart with His grace. Are you glad of this, and does this portion of God's mercy bring sweetness to you?

Poor soul, look on this side, and then look on the other side, and behold those oceans of eternal love on both sides directed towards you. Alas, what you have now is little in comparison. But if you look back, you will see that eternal love of God that was directed towards you before the world was made. And if you look ahead, you will see eternal life in all its glory, which shall never end, and which you shall actually possess. What you are presently experiencing is but a small stream compared to these two great oceans of love, flowing from eternity to eternity.

And when you hear that God intends to make you happy forever, that you shall remain a glorious and blessed being as long as God Himself lives, and that you shall be happy as long as God Himself is happy, perhaps you wonder, "How is this possible? Is it possible for such a poor, frail creature as I am to be happy for as long as God is happy?" Yes, do not doubt it, though it may seem an immense thing, for God has loved you from all eternity. Therefore, even though you have many frailties and sins, they cannot hinder you from receiving that eternal mercy which God has been planning for you.

I believe the Apostle argues in this way in Galatians 3:17: "The covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of no effect." Observe the Apostle's argument: the law, he says, cannot disannul the promise of grace. Why? Because it came four hundred and thirty years after the promise was made, and that which came so long afterward cannot disannul what was established before.

We may apply this argument in this way: surely, if you belong to this transaction between God and His Son, the sins you now fall into cannot take away God's love from you or prevent you from being happy forever. Why? Because God's covenant with His Son for your happiness was not merely four hundred and thirty years ago but countless millions of years ago. Therefore, what is happening now cannot annul what was established from all eternity. Comfort yourself with this when you hear that God was reconciling Himself to the world even before the world itself existed, yes, from all eternity.

Use 4

Again, it should encourage everyone to begin early in seeking grace and reconciliation with God. You who are young and in the prime of

your youth, crowned with the flowers of youth, consider this: God was working for your good before the world began. You should therefore be working for His glory as soon as you can. Should I not give the beginning of my years, my first fruits, to God, who loved me and was working for me before I was ever born? Therefore, it is fitting that He should have as much of my time as possible.

Use 5

Indeed, this should also serve as a powerful argument to motivate us all to be constant in holy living with God, because the Lord has been working from eternity and will continue working for our good into eternity. Therefore, whatever time we have, we should use it to serve and glorify God.

For, suppose we were to live ten thousand years, or ten thousand million years in this world; suppose God were to require us to live and serve Him in the way we do now, eternally; we should not think it too much, for we serve God only in one part of eternity, which is the part that is yet to come. But God is merciful to us in both parts of eternity; His mercy extends to us from everlasting to everlasting. God is ahead of us in His mercy and love; His love was from eternity and shall continue to eternity. Therefore, we should not think it a burden to serve God and glorify Him in ways of holiness for all the time we have been appointed to live. And when we have done all, we still cannot match the workings He has undertaken for us.

But I shall leave this point, and may the Lord seal it with His blessing upon our spirits.

Chapter 33

Of God's Reconciling the World to Himself

The next point, being the seventh proposed in the first chapter, is that God was reconciling the *world* to Himself. As the text states, God has been reconciling the *world* to Himself. This statement, found here in the text, is essentially the same in meaning as what we have in John 3:16: "For God so loved the *world* that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The world, you may ask—how is that? Did God reconcile *all* the world to Himself?

No, we are to understand this statement here as an indefinite proposition, not as if it were a universal proposition. The correct understanding of the difference between a universal and an indefinite proposition is of great importance to us, both in this and many other points of divinity.

A universal proposition speaks of the general in such a way that it includes every particular under it. An indefinite proposition, however, speaks only of the general and does not include every particular, but only many. For example, if one were to say, "Such a man teaches all the children in such a town," we do not mean that there is no individual child who is not taught—for there are infants, and there may be some who are not taught at all. What we mean is that he teaches those children who come to him to be taught; he is there, ready and prepared to teach them. In this sense, he may be said to teach all the children in the town—that is, there is a general proposition without a specific restriction, even though every

individual is not contained within it. This is an indefinite proposition or expression.

However, when we speak of a universal proposition, we refer to all particulars, and none can be excluded; all must fall under that proposition. Understanding this distinction will be helpful in other areas of divinity. For instance, regarding the promise, "I will be your God and the God of your seed," we must understand this as an indefinite proposition, and so all who comprehend it rightly understand it.

Many who do not understand the difference between these two types of propositions believe they have a strong objection, saying, "This promise cannot apply to the godly, for then all the children of the godly would be godly too." No, it is not a universal proposition that includes every particular, but rather an indefinite one. It means this: God promises to be the God of His people and their seed—that is, He will show mercy to their seed rather than to the seed of others. He will more likely draw the line of election through their lineage than through that of others. He will take them—not every individual one of them—but take them indefinitely, without revealing which specific person He will take, whether this one or that one. He speaks indefinitely, meaning that those who are the seed of His people shall be brought into a closer circle, into a nearer limit of God's grace than the seed of others, and He will be gracious to their seed rather than to others.

In the same way, when we read that God saved the world or reconciled the world, these propositions are to be understood alike, as indefinite statements. It does not mean that He loves or reconciles every individual person in the world, just as He is the God of the seed of the saints. It should not be understood that He is the God of every

particular one of them; He is pleased to express Himself indefinitely, rather than universally.

Chapter 34

God's Reconciling *the World* to Himself—Not Every Individual Person, as Proven by Scripture, and Three Reasons

To begin, we must clarify what is meant by God reconciling Himself to the world—that is, to mankind or human nature, though not to every individual person within human nature. I will show you this in two parts:

First, that it cannot be meant for every individual person; and secondly, why it is expressed in such broad terms as *the world*.

First, I will demonstrate that it cannot refer to every individual man or woman in the world. In fact, there is a large portion of the world—so significant a portion that the world may be named from them—whom Christ has rejected and will never reconcile. This is clearly shown in John 17, where Christ says that He does not pray for the world. If Christ did not pray for the world, then He surely did not die for the world. There are some in the world for whom Christ did not even pray. How then could God be reconciling Himself to the world when Christ explicitly states He did not pray for the world? This alone shows that we are not to understand *the world* as referring to every particular man or woman; there are some in the world whom God never intended to reconcile to Himself.

1. Additionally, this is clear because if God were reconciling Himself to the entire world, then all would surely believe and be saved. Why? Because Christ would have paid the price for all, and the blood of Christ pardons the sin of unbelief as much as any other sin. If Christ laid down His life for someone, He would have purchased from God the Father the deliverance of that soul from unbelief. Faith is a blessing that comes through Christ, just like any other blessing. I ask you: Is not faith a spiritual blessing like any other grace? Ephesians 1:3 states: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ." Therefore, all spiritual blessings are in Christ, and faith is one of these blessings. Thus, Christ has purchased faith for whomever He died, and they must believe in time. Christ did not leave our salvation to chance, saying, "I will lay down my life, and if people believe, they shall be reconciled." No, Christ laid down His life to purchase belief as well as eternal life. Therefore, if you believe, know that it is the fruit of Christ's purchase, just as heaven itself is. If God were reconciling Himself to the entire world, then all would believe and become believers. But since this is not the case, it is clear that Christ never intended it. That is the first reason.

2. A second argument is this: If Christ paid the price for the entire world, leaving it up to people to believe or not believe, then the grand workings of God—Election, Redemption, Justification, and Glorification—would depend more on human will than on the work of God. Some would argue, "God indeed has done His part, but it is up to individuals to believe or not." This would mean that all of God's great counsels rest upon man's will. Surely, this is not the case. Christ did not leave it so; rather,

those whom He reconciled to God, He reconciled in such a way that they will believe. This is not true of the entire world.

3. Further, if Christ paid the price for all, leaving it to human free will to believe or not, then Judas would be just as indebted to Christ for salvation as Peter. You might say, "But Judas was never saved; Peter was." According to this logic, however, Christ did as much for Judas as He did for Peter, for He shed His blood for both. The only difference would be that Peter, by his own free will, believed, while Judas did not. In this view, Peter would owe no more gratitude to Christ than Judas. Peter could say, "Lord, You did no more for me than for Judas. The only difference is that I believed, and he did not. If he had believed, he would have been saved just as I am." This doctrine, which holds that Christ died for all, dishonours the grace of God.

Many further arguments could be made, but because they are less clear for general understanding, I will leave them for now. However, I will add that the doctrine of universal redemption—teaching that Christ paid the price for all the world and left it to individuals to believe or not—is Arminian doctrine. In contrast, true evangelical doctrine teaches that Christ paid the price for specific individuals, and God determined which particular ones in the world would be reconciled to Him. These individuals will believe and be saved for eternity.

Chapter 35

Why God's Reconciling to Himself is Expressed in Such a Broad Term as *the World*—Six Reasons for This

But you may ask: If it is true that God has made such a distinction, reconciling Himself from all eternity to some and not to all, then why use this phrase? Why does He say that He loved the world and that He was reconciling Himself to the world without any distinction? Wouldn't it make more sense for God to say that He was reconciling Himself to some in the world, that He loved some in the world, and not the world in general? However, God chose to express it in this more general phrase for these six reasons.

Reason 1:
First, He uses the term *the world* to exclude angels, who are not properly of this world. However, this reason alone does not fully address why God would choose to say *the world* rather than specifying this or that man within the world.

Reason 2:
Secondly, another reason is to show the sufficiency of Christ's death and the work of Redemption; there is enough in it to save as many worlds as might exist.

Reason 3:
Thirdly, another reason is to demonstrate that, in the ministry of the Gospel, no one is to be excluded—not even the worst sinners in the world. For this reason, God does not say, in the ministry of the Gospel, that Christ died for this or that particular man or woman, but instead says that He died for *the world*. This way, He shows that He has not excluded the worst and vilest sinners in the world and that even the most notorious and greatest sinners can come and be reconciled.

If God had expressed it as, "There are some in the world whom I have been reconciling myself to from all eternity," then a sinner might say, "Surely, if there are only some, God never intended me, who have been such a wicked wretch and notorious sinner." Therefore, God did not phrase it that way but instead chose the most general terms so that no sinner in the world could claim, "Lord, I was excluded." Instead, God ensures that the ministry of His Gospel is expressed in such broad terms that every sinner has the opportunity to come and receive mercy.

Thus, in Mark 16:15, when Christ gives His commission to His disciples to preach, He says, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." That is, preach to mankind, who is a microcosm of every creature. Even to the Gentiles, who had previously been denied the favour of the Gospel as if they were not part of God's creation, this message now extends. If you are a creature, the Gospel is to be preached to you. There is to be a general offer of grace and mercy to every creature throughout the entire world, including the greatest sinners who walk the earth. Both great sinners and small, all are to receive the offer of reconciliation with God.

The ministers of the Gospel are to proclaim, in the name of God, that the Lord offers this mercy and salvation to everyone. This is to be done ministerially to every creature we preach to, not just to the great sinners but also to those in the most humble conditions in the world.

For example, some may say, "If God is to show mercy to some in the world, surely it must be to those who are great and influential, those who can perform great service for Him. What service can God receive from me, a poor creature who spends my days in a dark, small

dwelling and can do no significant work for Him? Will God ever consider me?" Yes, if you are a creature of God and live in this world, you are no more excluded from reconciliation with God than the kings and emperors of the earth. In fact, it may be that God thinks of you in your humble thatched cottage while He passes by the great monarchs of the world.

Therefore, this expression is made so broad that even the poorest people and the greatest sinners may know they are not excluded from the offer of grace in the Gospel. This is the third reason.

Reason 4

A fourth reason why it is expressed in such terms is that, by this, the Lord may show that those who will actually come to be reconciled to Him must do so while they are in this world. The only people capable of reconciliation are those living in the world. If they are not reconciled before they leave this world, they will never be reconciled. Hence, the phrase "God is reconciling the world to Himself." It is as if He is saying: "If you leave this world without being reconciled to God, you are lost forever." The object of this grace is only those who live in the world. If they pass up this opportunity and are not reconciled to God while here, they will never be reconciled; for God is not reconciling Himself to those who are in Hell—they are no longer part of this world. They were allowed by God's patience to live for a time in the world, and here they filled it with sin as much as they could. Now that they are out of the world, they have moved beyond the reach of God's grace, which will never shine upon them again. They will never again hear any offer of the Gospel. This is the fourth reason.

Reason 5

A fifth reason is this: God, through this, shows His wonderful love

and free grace to wretched creatures by regarding such vile beings as those who live in the world. What is the world, after all? It is a dunghill of filth, as the Apostle says in 1 John 5:19, "The whole world lies in wickedness." It lies there like a dead dog or carcass in a common sewer, in a ditch, covered in slime and filth. Now, that God should set His heart upon the world—what an infinite and wonderful love and free grace is this! The truth is, before our conversion, we all lie in wickedness, like a dead dog lying in the road, covered in gore and mire. Yet, that the great God of Heaven should send His own Son into the world to die for such as us; that He should make such a one an heir of Heaven and eternal life; that such a one should become a member of His Son and have everlasting communion with Himself; and that this should be planned by God from all eternity—what an infinite love of God this is! And again, the world lies in wickedness, the world that is so vile and unworthy, and yet the Lord is reconciling the world to Himself. What an infinite and inconceivable free grace of God this is!

Reason 6

The sixth reason is that those who live in the world will, in time, generally come to God and indeed be actually reconciled. Although the world is not currently reconciled to God on a large scale, the Lord has His appointed time when the Jews shall be called, and the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, at which point we shall better understand the generality of this expression. God has promised that Christ shall possess the farthest reaches of the Earth and that the heirs of the promise shall inherit the world. I understand this literally, as it is stated in Romans 4:13: "For the promise to Abraham and his offspring, that he would be heir of the world, was not through the law but through the righteousness of faith." This promise is yet to be fulfilled in a literal sense. In some spiritual sense, the saints may already be said to be heirs of the world, for, indeed, the right belongs

especially to them (though ungodly men have a right by gift, as He gives the earth to the children of men). But not by inheritance, as the saints have, as servants have a right to their food and drink by what is given to them; but the children have a right by inheritance. Thus, the saints have a right to this world as well as to Heaven, and there is a time coming when they will possess their inheritance. Then the text will be true literally.

And thus, you have been given the reasons for this phrase; and this may suffice for explaining the point that it is the world that God was reconciling Himself to.

Chapter 36

Use 1: Seeing God has excepted none from mercy, let none except themselves

By way of application now, and that very briefly, only two particulars.

First, seeing God offers reconciliation in such general and large terms to the world, if God has not excluded anyone, let none exclude themselves. Are you a person living here in the world? There need be no further qualification for the offer of grace, for the gospel is offered to you with this one condition: that you live in the world. God does not call for qualifications such as being a person of a certain rank, dignity, or having committed certain sins. Nor does He require that you must first be terrified, humbled, or have undergone certain experiences. No, we are commissioned to preach the Gospel to

anyone who has no other qualification than simply being alive in the world.

Indeed, if you had left this world, even if you had only one sinful thought to answer for, we could not preach the Gospel to you. Even if it were possible for an angel to come to your soul after it had departed from this world, yet it could not, nor dare to, preach the Gospel to you. But while you are in this world, we are appointed to preach the Gospel to you and extend the offer of grace and mercy to you.

There is no counsel of God revealed either to angels or men that has excluded anyone in the greatest congregation of people from reconciliation with God. And you who hear or read what I now say, you may bless God that you are included. Bless God when you hear and read this: there is no counsel of God against you made known either to angels or men that excludes you from reconciliation. Every particular person, as far as we know, in any congregation, may be reconciled to God and have eternal life.

Oh, only take heed not to abuse this grace of God; look to it that you make good use of this grace. This is what we are bound to tell you, and in the name of God, we declare it to you. God presents this Gospel to us in these broad terms, that you may be left utterly without excuse if you perish. None of you, if you perish, can say, "I was such a vile sinner that I was afraid I would never be received by God, even if I humbled myself and came to Him." For God will answer you, "Were you such a vile sinner? Did I not reveal my Gospel in such general terms that none might exclude themselves? Did I not say I was reconciling myself to the world? And did I make any exceptions of you in particular? You should have come in with the rest and ventured your soul upon the offer of my free grace."

Indeed, there can be no other encouragement but this for the first step. Whoever believes at any time does so not because any personal qualification gives them a right to it, but because God has reconciled the world to Himself and has offered the promise of grace generally. He has said, "Whosoever will, let them come in and believe; whosoever is thirsty, let them come." This word of His is my warrant; that indefinite promise that God has made is a sufficient encouragement. If I can entrust my soul to this, it is what grants me a right and interest in the grace of God, and whoever has been saved has been saved on these terms.

The first step has always been a kind of venture; they have risked their souls upon this grace of God, thus generally and indefinitely offered. You should do the same in your private prayers. You whose consciences condemn you of great and notorious sins, when you hear of this general offer—even though you do not know whether you are elected or not—do not trouble yourself with such thoughts but venture to cast your soul upon this free grace of God in Christ, with the resolve to give yourself to the service of God from now on.

Though you may not have the ability in yourself, who knows? Perhaps at that very instant, God's Spirit may come to enable you to do it. This is what God requires. And if God persuades your heart to this, it is a good sign that mercy is intended for you. Every time God offers the Gospel to you, if it stirs your heart to conclude, "Well, I will venture my soul upon this offer; God has not excluded me, so why should I exclude myself? God has not cast me away, so why should I make myself a castaway?" do not despair but believe.

Chapter 37

USE 2

Secondly, hence it concerns us all to be vigilant while we live in this world, ensuring that God's work is done upon our hearts while we are here, that we may be reconciled to Him. For if the thread of our life is once cut and we are no longer in this world, leaving it without being reconciled to God, we are undone creatures forever.

We often say of those who are dying, "Alas, such a one is now no longer of this world." Well, they must have ensured that the work of reconciliation was done beforehand, for once you leave this world, you are gone forever. O, then apply yourself to this work while you still have time, and take hold of the means and opportunities which God affords you while you are still a person of this world; do not waste it.

Know this: it is a great mercy from God to continue you in this world because here you are under the power of grace. You are under that general grace of God that is indefinitely offered to every person, under that grace which has fallen upon sinners as great as you are. Therefore, as long as there is life, there is hope.

I have made use of this point many times to show that this time of our lives is the time of grace and salvation, and it follows naturally and fully from the expression in the text. Therefore, I shall leave it. But let me tell you this much: though God expresses this grace of reconciliation here to the world, if ever you are actually and indeed reconciled to God before you leave this world, God will make you no longer a person of this world. Even though you are in the world, you will no longer be of it, but above it.

Therefore, in John 17, you will find when Christ speaks of those the Father had given Him and who had believed in Him, He says in verses 14 and 16, "I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil."

It's true that when people have believed in Christ, they are in the world, and Christ does not pray that God would take them out of the world but that He would preserve them in it. This should teach us, by the way, to be content to live in the world, even though it is a dangerous and evil place. For it was as dangerous and evil a world in which the disciples and Christ lived. They were in danger of death for the profession of their religion, and yet, even though Christ loved His disciples, He did not pray that they should be taken out of the world.

Many discontented people will pray that God would take them out of the world. But no, says Christ; "keep them in this world." And then He says, "They are not of the world." Indeed, God is reconciling Himself to the world, that is, to those who are in the world. But once reconciled, they are no longer people of the world, though they are in it. Therefore, if you are one whom God the Father and the Son have agreed upon from all eternity to be reconciled to Him in time, you will be brought to be one who is not of the world, even while you live in it.

Therefore, you who are not only in the world but are worldly people who focus only on the things of this world, know that the work of reconciliation is not yet done with your souls. What God has done concerning you in His eternal purpose from all eternity, we do not know. But as yet, the work is not done upon your soul; you are not reconciled to God. That is, you have not been brought into such a

disposition in your own heart as to be at peace with God. And if you are ever to have any peace at all, know that it must be done here in this world; the work of reconciliation must be done here.

Thus much for that point, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

Chapter 38

Not Imputing Their Trespasses: Explained with Three Notes on the Text

Now follows the two other expressions: *"Not imputing their trespasses to them"* and *"hath committed to us the word of reconciliation."* I may finish the first in a few words: *"not imputing their trespasses,"* meaning, not reckoning or charging their sins to their own account—that is the sense of the word.

As a man who is in debt, we say there is so much "standing against him," or so much "on his account." Now, when God is said not to impute your trespasses, the meaning is that your debt is cancelled and reckoned as the debt of another. He no longer sets your sins on your account but on Christ's account. This is the happiness of believers: those sins that once stood against them are now taken off and placed on Christ's account.

This is a blessed doctrine, and we cannot speak of it without trembling of heart, for we know how prone people are to abuse it. Yet

the children must have the bread given to them, even if it may tend to the ruin and destruction of others.

You who are sinners and continue in sin, though you see it not, you run up a debt every day. Like some gallants who enter an inn or tavern, calling for wine and good cheer, never thinking that there is someone, all the while they are eating and drinking and being merry, behind the door with a piece of chalk, recording all their expenses, who will at last call in for the payment. Every sin we commit is recorded, and there will come a time when God will call for payment.

You might ask, "How is it then that God says their sins shall not be imputed?" It is because Christ comes and all that is on our account is taken off and placed on His, but the debt must still be paid. So this phrase denotes that the salvation of man is not simply from a free pardon, as if a man in debt had his creditor come and say, "I will clear the debt; I will wipe it off and pardon it all." No, the way of man's salvation is like this: there is a debt, and it must be paid. Christ, the surety, comes and pays it for some, while others are cast into the prison of hell, where they must lie until they have paid the uttermost farthing; for the debt must be paid.

Herein lies the difference between believers and others. Those who are damned run up their debts all their lives, and at last, God comes to reckon with them. But they have nothing to pay, and God says to the devil, "Take him, jailer." Death is God's sergeant to arrest him, and the devil is the jailer who takes him to prison, where he must remain until he has paid the uttermost farthing.

But believers who have run up their debts—in the days of their youth, when they were apprentices, and even since they were married—find that when divine justice is ready to seize upon them, Christ intervenes and says, "Let the person be freed; I will pay the debt."

Just as if a spendthrift runs up a debt and, when he is arrested and ready to be taken to jail, a friend steps in and says, "Release him, and I will pay the debt." So Christ does this for believers.

Thus, when our sins are forgiven, they are forgiven at great cost; our deliverance costs much. I note this from the original phrase in the text: it says, *"not reckoning or accounting it to the score."* I have, in many sermons, explained the doctrine of the pardon of sin; therefore, I do not intend to elaborate on that here. I will only provide a few notes that are most relevant to this text.

Note 1: The first is this: There may be sin in the soul, yet it is not imputed. Therefore, there may be a righteousness imputed that is not our own. There is the same basis for both. Many of our adversaries cry out against the imputation of righteousness, saying, "How can that which is not our righteousness be made ours?" For, if we believe, the righteousness of Christ, which is not ours, is made ours. How can that be, they ask? Yes, it can be, just as that which is our sin shall not be counted as our sin. If that which is our own shall not be imputed, then that which is not our own may likewise be imputed.

Note 2: Secondly (which is a note of marvellous comfort): There may be reconciliation with God, even while much sin remains in the soul. It is not said, *"Reconciling the world to himself, taking away their sins, purging out all their sins,"* as if there could be no reconciliation until all their sins were removed. Rather, *"he was reconciling the world to himself, not imputing"*—that is the phrase. As if he had said, "O you sinners, as long as you live in this world, you will have sin. Therefore, do not think that God is not reconciled to you, or that you are not reconciled to God. No, even though sin

remains in your hearts, God may still be reconciled to you, not imputing your sins."

This should encourage you to labour to purge out sin as much as you can, seeing that the grace of God is such that, even with sin remaining in you, God is still reconciling you to himself. It is not such a great thing for God to be reconciled to the angels in heaven who have no sin in them. But for God to be reconciled to his saints on earth who have so much sin in them—that is something extraordinary!

Many of God's people cannot distinguish between the *non-imputation* of sin and the *presence* of sin within them. They think that because they have much sin in them, the Lord will not be reconciled to them. But know this: even though sin is in you, it may not be imputed to you. Therefore, learn to distinguish between sin being in you and sin not being imputed to you.

This should also teach us to be willing to be reconciled to others, even though there are many weaknesses in them and they may continue to offend us. Be reconciled to your servants, children, and neighbours. Do not say, "I could be reconciled to them if I saw them truly changed." What do you mean by that? Do you mean that you wish to see no more weaknesses in them or that they will never offend you again? Will you wait that long? God does not wait that long for you. He doesn't withhold his reconciliation until you reach heaven and are perfected. No, he is reconciled to you even now, while you have a nature that constantly bubbles up with sin against him. Despite the presence of sin in you, God can distinguish between the presence of sin and the imputation of it.

Note 3: We see here the foundation of all our reconciliation: the *non-imputation* of our sins. It is no evidence that God is reconciled

to a man simply because he allows him to prosper in the world or because he has been at sea and has gained great wealth on his voyage. Perhaps the man blesses himself, thinking, "Oh! Now all is well between God and me, for he has given me so much wealth and blessed me in such a voyage." Alas, you are mistaken if you think this is evidence of reconciliation. No, the foundation of reconciliation is *non-imputation*.

Do you have evidence that God has revealed Christ to you and that in his Son, he has not imputed your sin to you? And do you build your peace upon that? This will hold firm.

Many build their peace on the fact that their sins are not as great as others. But what of that? Even if it is only one sin you are guilty of, though it be of the least nature, if it is imputed to you, it is enough to make your soul and God eternal enemies. Others have committed sins a long time ago, and they have worn out the trouble of them, and now they feel at peace. But let them know that the debt still remains; it has not been taken off.

Just as a man may wait a long time before calling in his debt but will eventually do so, sooner or later, so too with you. You may have settled into a kind of peace and worn out the trouble of your conscience, but as long as your sins remain on the account and are not wiped off, God will call for payment sooner or later. Therefore, do not place your peace in anything else in the world but in being reconciled to God in Christ, with him not imputing your sins to you.

Chapter 39:

The Minister's Commission to Preach Reconciliation to the World

We now proceed to the next matter: the commission for the declaration of this doctrine of reconciliation with God in Christ, as stated in the latter part of verse 19: *"And hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."*

The original Greek wording differs slightly from what you find in your English Bibles. The word *"committed"* is rendered as *"put into us,"* so that the phrase reads literally, *"And he hath put in us the word of reconciliation."* However, because this direct translation might sound somewhat harsh in English, the translators have rendered it as, *"And hath committed to us."* The original expression conveys that it is essential for a minister of the Gospel to have the doctrine of reconciliation sink deeply into their own heart. In this way, when they speak to others, they speak from the heart and thus reach the hearts of their listeners. As the saying goes, "The word that comes from the heart goes to the heart."

Therefore, it is of great importance that a minister of the Gospel has the word of reconciliation and the mysteries of the Gospel deeply rooted in their heart. This enables them to speak to the people not merely from the tongue or head but from their heart, out of personal experience. In doing so, their ministry becomes more effective and reaches the hearts of those they speak to.

This expression is similar to what is written in Galatians 1:15-16: *"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me."* Notice, Paul does not say, *"to reveal his Son to me,"* but *"in me."* Therefore,

it is fitting that a minister of the Gospel should be truly profitable when Jesus Christ is revealed *in* them.

This explains the phrase *"hath committed unto us,"* meaning "put in us" the word of reconciliation. As if the Apostle were saying, "The Lord, who has been, from all eternity, plotting the great work of reconciling the world to himself through that great mystery of godliness in Christ, has appointed certain chosen messengers to carry this message to the world. These messengers are to reveal the glorious counsels of God's will concerning the children of men and to declare this great doctrine of reconciliation in Christ."

The work of reconciling the world unto himself in Christ is the very task that we, as ministers, are sent into the world to perform. We serve as the ambassadors of Christ, coming in his name to engage with the world about reconciliation with God, about establishing peace with God.

Thus, you have here the work of the ministers of the Gospel and the great responsibility entrusted to them: *"He hath committed unto us the ministry of reconciliation."* That is our work. Therefore, from this, we derive the central point of the text.

Doctrine: The ministry of reconciliation with God is committed to the ministers of God to preach to the world. The ministers of God have a commission from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to preach the doctrine of reconciliation to the people, as we read in the following words: *"We are ambassadors of Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God."*

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are involved in the commission given to God's ministers when they come to preach in the name of

God, as stated in Nehemiah 9:20: *"Thou gavest thy good spirit."* It was the prophet who came to instruct them; it was the Spirit of God in the prophet who instructed them. Thus, the ministers of God have their commission from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to come to the people and reveal the great counsels of God. They are sent by the entire Trinity to the people, and here is their commission, made clear.

However, the commission comes more immediately from Christ (though the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved) because Christ is the great Prophet of the Church. It is part of Christ's prophetic office to reveal the great counsel of God, his Father, in the mystery of our reconciliation to the people. Christ was first anointed, and then he, in turn, anoints other officers for this great work. In Isaiah 61, we find that the great Prophet is first anointed: *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me."* To what purpose? *"To preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion; to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified."*

This is essentially the same as the ministry of reconciliation, a more expansive expression of it. As you see here, this prophecy concerns Christ, who is first anointed. Christ is appointed by God the Father and the Holy Spirit, for *"the Spirit of God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me."* There is the Holy Spirit involved, and God the Father appoints him. God the Father may be said to be the

appointer, and the Holy Spirit anoints Jesus Christ to be a preacher of the Gospel. Being the prime and chief Prophet of the Church, Christ appoints others to exercise some aspect of his prophetic office, which is to preach the great doctrine of reconciliation: *"hath committed unto us the ministry of reconciliation."*

This is seen in the commission Christ gives in Mark 16:15-16: *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* He commands them to go and preach to every creature, declaring the doctrine of reconciliation by Christ.

Christ does not merely give them a commission; he also joins his own power to this commission and assures them that his power accompanies them. In Matthew 28:18, *"And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."* What follows in verse 19 is, *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."*

What a commission is this, and what a preamble to the commission! "I have received all power both in heaven and on earth." Then he instructs them, "Go and teach all nations," as if Christ were saying, "You are about to undertake the greatest work that any creature has ever engaged in within this world." Certainly, the ministry of reconciliation, next to the work of redemption that Christ himself was involved in, is the greatest task any creature in this world has undertaken. Regardless of what the world thinks of it, no angel in heaven has ever been employed in a greater work than this. Therefore, being of such great importance, Christ makes this preface: *"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go ye*

therefore." As if Christ were saying, "Be it known to you now that the power given to me by the Father shall go with you; therefore, be encouraged." Yet, they might well have asked, "Who is sufficient for such great things?"

But be not discouraged, says Christ; my power shall go with you to assist, comfort, and encourage you. It shall accompany you to make your ministry profitable to those who belong to my election. It shall be with you to defend you from all adversaries. The world will be enraged against you when you preach this doctrine, but my power will defend you from them all, strengthen you against all oppositions, and enable you to endure whatever may come upon you.

Further, says Christ, *"I am with you always, even to the end of the world."* One might think it would be sufficient for Christ to say, "I am with you to the end of the world," but there is something more in his words: *"I am with you always, even to the end of the world,"* meaning that he will not merely be with them without wholly abandoning them, but that there will not be a single moment until the end of the world when he is not present with them. He will not only overshadow them and send his presence, but he will be with them every moment, every day, with every sermon they preach. Even though those ministers who were with him physically died over 1,500 years ago, Christ says he will be with them to the end of the world—that is, with those who would succeed them in the ministry of reconciliation.

This is the commission given to them. When they come to any house, they are to begin by saying, *"Peace be to you,"* meaning the peace of God in Christ. This doctrine of reconciliation is something that must be understood through preaching. We can read very little of it; we can scarcely discern a single letter from the book of creation. We

cannot come to understand it through any knowledge of our own, nor can the natural world teach it to us. However, through creation, we can understand that God continues to show mercy to the just as well as the unjust, and the abundance of mercy we see in this world declares, with a loud voice, that there is a possibility for humanity to be reconciled to God. It signifies that there is mercy for mankind, echoing a message throughout all creation that humanity is in a better state than the devils. Certainly, if God had no intention of showing mercy to mankind, he would not continue to bestow so many mercies as he does.

While creation cannot show us Christ, it may reveal that God has a way of showing mercy to the children of men. This might be partly what is meant in Romans 10:18, where the Apostle says, *"But I say, have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world."* If you compare this text with Psalm 19, you will find it somewhat different: *"Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."* The "line" refers to the great message of God's grace, written in creation as if it were in a line of text.

In Psalm 19, it clearly speaks of the works of God in creation: *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament shows his handiwork."* Creation has a loud voice calling us to repentance. And there can be no call to repentance without it being, in essence, a voice of the Gospel. The Apostle plainly says in Romans 2:4 that the patience of God calls us to repentance. Whatever leads to repentance has something of the Gospel in it. The patience and goodness of God call us to repentance, even if we never hear the ministry of the Gospel.

The creature (creation itself) provides evidence, and this voice is applied to the Gospel in Romans 10. Unless you understand it this way, you might wonder how the Gospel's sound could have reached the utmost parts of the earth in the Apostle's time, considering many places remain undiscovered even today. Nevertheless, there is a kind of Gospel sound that echoes throughout the earth, telling us through creation that there is some way for God to be pacified towards sinful men, even though we might not know the specifics.

The devils have no such display of God's work, bounty, patience, or goodness toward them, indicating that God has no intention of reconciling with them. Though they are not yet fully experiencing the torment they will face, they are said to be *"reserved unto the great day in chains of darkness."* Meanwhile, wicked and ungodly people are preserved by the bounty and patience of God. They are drawn by the cords of God's bounty and mercy, unlike the devils and the damned who are kept in chains of darkness. Hence, from the bounty of God seen in creation, we can infer that God has some means of showing mercy to mankind.

However, it is impossible to understand from any work of creation that God would send the Second Person of the Trinity to take on human nature, to die, to suffer for humanity's sins, and to offer satisfaction to divine justice. We cannot deduce that we must be brought into this covenant or that Christ would become the head of this second covenant, with us as members of his body. The mysteries of the Gospel are not revealed by creation.

Therefore, as the Apostle says in Ephesians 3:8, *"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."* The riches of Christ are unsearchable—meaning they are beyond

understanding, with no trace or footprint of them to be found in creation. Thus, although there is a kind of sound in creation that God has a way to be reconciled with us, it is through the preaching of the Gospel that the full message of reconciliation is revealed. This responsibility, therefore, is committed to the preachers of the Gospel, as the Apostle states in 1 Corinthians 1:21: *"For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."*

Observe, the world did not know God by wisdom alone. Although they knew there was a God, infinite in power and goodness, they did not know God in a saving way through Christ. They might have understood that God had some way of showing mercy to sinners, but they did not know the manner or means of that mercy. It is not through wisdom or the understanding of creation that we come to know God in a saving way. Rather, it is through what the world deems "the foolishness of preaching" that God is pleased to save those who believe. Hence, it is evident that the ministry of reconciliation is committed to the preachers of the Gospel.

Chapter 40.

Why God Chose Men Rather than Angels to Dispense the Mystery of Reconciliation: The Reasons Thereof

Now, it is to be inquired, first, why God chose men rather than angels to be the dispensers of the great mystery of reconciliation. God has not committed this word of reconciliation to the angels (though it is

true that angels sometimes go about and bear witness to the Gospel, as you may read later). However, they are not appointed to the office of the ministry of the Gospel in the same way as human ministers are. God has not chosen angels in an ordinary way to come and dispense these great and glorious things to the children of men.

Objection: You may ask, would it not have been better for God to have chosen angels to come and preach Jesus Christ rather than men, since men are weak creatures and like ourselves? When they stand up to preach about reconciling men to God, should we think they know more than we do?

Answer: You must not think that good can only be done when someone tells you something you have never heard before.

Rather, you must understand that it is by virtue of the ordinance of Christ. Because Christ has appointed a minister of the Gospel to come and preach in this way, even though the instrument may be like yourself and perhaps may not have a deeper understanding than some of you, you are to look beyond just the words he speaks. You are to view it as the ordinance of Christ and to expect and regard all means accordingly.

The primary standing ordinance in the Church of God is the ministry of the Gospel. It is this that is committed to us to preach, and it should therefore be viewed as the power of God for salvation to those whom God intends to save. God has not chosen angels but men, for a reason: we are not as capable of conversing with angels as we are with men. We would not be able to stand before them. When an angel has sometimes appeared to a devout servant of God, that person has often been overwhelmed by the glory and has fallen down. For instance, when the angels appeared in Luke 2,

proclaiming, *"Glory to God in the highest,"* they struck the shepherds with amazement.

Secondly, the ministry of angels would not be as effective because angels do not fully understand the inner workings and turnings of the human heart in the way that men do. A man is more aware of the turnings and complexities of his own heart than any angel can be. By knowing his own heart, a man is more capable of speaking in a way that resonates with others. We do not read in Scripture that angels know the thoughts of men's hearts any more than they are expressed outwardly, nor do the devils know them. Searching the heart is described as a unique property of God. However, a man can search his own heart to a greater extent than angels can, and therefore, he can speak more suitably to the hearts of others.

Thus, in his wisdom, God has chosen to commit the ministry of reconciliation to men rather than to angels.

A third reason, and a particularly significant one, is that the power of God might be more evident in the conversion of souls to Jesus Christ. Indeed, in this one matter, the power of God appears far greater than in the creation of heaven and earth.

Firstly, the doctrine of reconciliation is the most elevated and supernatural matter in the world—it surpasses the comprehension of any creature.

Secondly, it humbles human nature as much as possible. Consider that initially, a few poor fishermen, to whom the word of reconciliation was committed, along with a few apostles in a poor, mean, and contemptible state—who sometimes scarcely had rags to cover themselves, were whipped, imprisoned, and treated as though they were the vilest rogues on earth—yet, through these weak and

lowly means, God subdued many nations and, in time, brought the whole world to receive this doctrine. O, how the infinite power and glory of God shine forth! By using weak means, God demonstrates the greatness of his power. As it is clearly stated in 2 Corinthians 4:7: *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels,"* referring to the ministry of reconciliation. Indeed, it is a treasure in earthen vessels. The Greek word here implies "vessels of shells." These were certain valuable shells that appeared plain and worthless on the outside but contained precious pearls within, worth many thousands of pounds. So, we have this treasure in an earthen vessel—in a poor, weak, frail, and contemptible human vessel.

And why? The apostle provides the reason: *"That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."* There is a mighty power of God that accompanies the ministry of reconciliation. Whenever a soul is brought to be reconciled with God, there is certainly a mighty, even hyperbolic, power at work.

Objection: But how does this demonstrate that such a mighty power of God accompanies the ministry of reconciliation?

It is evident in this: that such mighty things are accomplished through such poor, weak, and contemptible means. People are willing to part with everything in the world, even their very lives, and endure the greatest torments of the most cruel tyrants, all to bear witness to this truth. This proves the mighty power of God. This provides a silent answer to an objection found in 2 Corinthians 3: Is it true that the ministers of the Gospel are far more glorious than the ministers of the Law? Then why are the ministers of the Gospel in such a mean condition, much poorer than the ministers of the Law? Under the Law, the high priest wore glorious robes with precious stones upon his breast and shoulders. But now, the ministers of the

Gospel are often just poor fishermen—weak and insignificant in the eyes of the world. Surely, some might say, the ministers of the Law were more glorious than the ministers of the Gospel.

No, the apostle explains, *"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."* And we are content, he implies, to be earthen vessels so that God's power may appear even greater and his glory shine more brightly.

Another reason why God commits this ministry to poor men rather than to angels is that it serves, in just judgment, as a stumbling block to wicked and ungodly people whose hearts oppose the glorious Gospel. Just as Christ said he spoke in parables *"that seeing, they might not see, and hearing, they might not understand"*—a just judgment against the Pharisees and others with wicked, unclean hearts opposed to Christ—so too, the humble means of the Gospel ministry (which the world counts as foolishness) and the lowly condition of Gospel preachers act as a stumbling block to ungodly people whom God has destined to perish eternally. Because their hearts are wicked and perverse, God hides this rich treasure from them. He says, in effect, "I hate them and will keep this treasure hidden, showing them only the outward appearance." But for those whom God loves, he opens up the inside, revealing the true treasure.

There are others whom God intends to save. To them, he speaks not only through the outward ministry but also directly to their hearts, revealing the inward treasure. They see its glory, admire it, taste the sweet promises of the Gospel, and adore God for such blessings. Thus, God achieves his purposes: hiding the Gospel from some in his just judgment and revealing it to others. Therefore, as the apostle says in 2 Corinthians 4:3, *"If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost."* The ministry of the Gospel is concealed from some, but

only from those who are lost; it is hidden from them through these outward means.

Thus, you see why God has committed the ministry of reconciliation to men rather than to angels.

Chapter 41:

Why God Will Not Himself Immediately Dispense This Gospel Reconciliation

But further, one might ask: why will God not immediately preach this doctrine of the Gospel himself, the mystery of reconciliation? We see many infirmities in men; people are quick to stumble over the faults of Gospel ministers (which, by the way, should teach ministers to be mindful of their conduct). Given that there are so many things to criticise about men, we might be inclined to think that if God himself were to preach the Gospel from heaven, people would pay more attention.

No, God will not do that. Though he will assist the ministry to make it effective in the hearts of those who will be saved, he will not speak directly from heaven but will instead send men like themselves. Let men hear or not; even if they think they would listen if God himself spoke, those who do not listen to men would not listen to God either. God did speak from heaven in delivering the Law, but people still did not keep it. Now, God chooses to speak through men because he delights in using every creature according to its capacity.

The Lord takes great delight in employing all means suitable to his creation. Therefore, you will find (which is very noteworthy) that although God began to speak from heaven to Saul when he converted him (later called Paul), he did not do the entire work himself directly. Before the work could be completed, he used means. In Acts 9:4, Christ speaks from heaven. But observe this carefully: what does Christ say from heaven? He does not preach the Gospel but merely speaks a word of conviction: *"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"* This was enough to strike Saul with astonishment, so that he fell to the ground and said, *"Lord, what would you have me do?"*

But notice what answer is given to him: *"Go into the city, and it shall be told you."* You must not think that just because I have begun to speak from heaven to you, I will complete the work myself. You must be content to rely on means, and so Saul did. He arose from the ground (verse 8), and God made him wait before telling him what to do. He spent three days and nights without eating, praying all the while. Then, in verse 10, the Lord spoke to Ananias (one of his ministers), saying, *"Go to such a place, and there you shall reveal my mercy to Saul—this doctrine of reconciliation."*

It is true that God began to think of Saul, but he would not complete the work himself. Instead, he chose to use Ananias, and Saul had to depend on Ananias's ministry to learn about God's mercy in Christ for his soul. God then blessed Ananias's ministry to Saul's soul.

You see, then, how God insists on using means. I am confident that God's dealings with many of you are similar. Though God may initially strike terror into your hearts, like when a person is going about their business and is suddenly struck with the thought, "Lord, where am I? What if I were to die now? How can I answer for all I've done before God?" Thus, a person may become troubled in their

conscience through an immediate work of God, but God does not continue this work directly. Instead, he sends that person to the ministers of his Word, who show them what they must do for their good.

Let me share with you a notable text that demonstrates how God uses means. In Acts 10:2, we read about Cornelius, a soldier and a centurion of the Italian band. Although many of his soldiers were wicked, he was a devout man, full of prayer, as it is commendable for soldiers to be. Because they carry their lives in their hands, they need to carry grace in their hearts.

In verse 3, God accepts Cornelius's prayers and appears to him in a vision, sending an angel to tell him that his prayers have been well received. However, Cornelius knew very little of Christ.

Objection: You might say, “Since God sent an angel to Cornelius, why did the angel not reveal Christ to him?”

No, God would not do that. He sent an angel to tell Cornelius to send for Peter, a minister of the Gospel. The angel's message was to inform him that God regarded his prayers and alms, but as if the angel were saying, "God has more to tell you, but I have no commission to tell you myself. My commission is to tell you to send for a minister." So, Cornelius sent for Peter, and Peter came and preached Christ to him, as you can read in verse 34.

Thus, you see that God usually works through means. Indeed, by doing this, God honours human nature by involving it in his work. To further demonstrate how God honours the ministry of his Word, consider this: when Christ himself preached on earth, we never read of him converting as many souls as the ministers of the Gospel did. Peter, when he preached the Gospel, converted three thousand souls

in one sermon, but we never read that Christ converted that many in a single sermon.

The reason for this is to show that we should not expect God to preach to us directly. Instead, we are to receive God and Christ's message through the ministry of men. That is the point. So now, the matter is made clear: God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.

I will now proceed to apply this point.

Chapter 42

Use 1: The Sending of the Ministers of the Gospel Is to Be Accounted a Glorious Blessing

Firstly, if this is the great work of the ministers sent among you, to dispense the ministry of reconciliation, then certainly the sending of any ministers of the Gospel among you should be considered a glorious and wonderful blessing from God. Why? What is their mission? They come to negotiate with your souls about reconciliation with God, and God has appointed this as the great means of bringing souls to himself. Therefore, it is one of the greatest blessings in the world to have the ministry of the Gospel in any congregation.

"Blessed are your eyes," says Christ, *"that you see such things, and your ears that you hear such things,"* for God has placed you in times where you can witness the mighty things of the ministry of the

Gospel. It is a good indication that God has many souls to be reconciled when he sends the ministers of the Gospel to a place.

Thus, when Paul was leaving a place, God appeared to him in the night and encouraged him, saying, *"I have many souls in this city."* When God, in a special way, sends the preaching of the Gospel to a place, the people there should bless God from their souls and take it as a sign that surely God has many souls in that place whom he intends to reconcile. The ministry of the Gospel is the ministry of reconciliation, and it is the fruit of the prayer of Jesus Christ.

To support this, compare the Scriptures together, and it becomes clear. In Isaiah 49:8, quoted in 2 Corinthians 6:2, we see this. When Paul was preaching to them, he makes this the fulfillment of that prophecy in Isaiah 49. Now, it is clear that this prophecy is about Christ praying to God the Father for those who belong to his elect, that in due time they might have the doctrine of reconciliation revealed to them.

Now, says God, *"I have heard you in an acceptable time,"* and Paul adds, *"Now is the acceptable time."* Therefore, any time you come to hear a sermon and hear the doctrine of reconciliation explained to you, you should think this: *"This morning, or this day, I am witnessing the fruit of the prayer of Jesus Christ for this congregation, and for myself in particular. Christ was praying to his Father for this long before I was born, and now I am experiencing the fruit of that prayer."*

The very sound of the Gospel in my ears this morning is none other than the fruit of Jesus Christ's prayer to God the Father, long before I even existed or before the world was.

Chapter 43

Use 2: The Great Honour of Faithful Ministers

Secondly, hence appears the great honour of the ministers of the Gospel in their ministry. We will not attribute this to our persons but to our work. Certainly, if they are committed to the ministry of reconciliation, they are sent about the most honourable business that has ever been in the world: to dispense to the children of men the great mystery of salvation through Jesus Christ.

If a minister is faithful in it, it may be said of anyone whom God uses in this work: *"Happy is he that he was ever born, and blessed be the womb that bore him, and the breasts that gave him suck,"* if he remains faithful in his task. For he is employed in the greatest business that exists in the world; never did God employ angels in a work of greater consequence or one wherein they are more honoured. Ministers are called in Scripture "angels of the churches," for indeed, their work is evangelical.

When speaking of them in 1 Corinthians 4:1, it says, *"Therefore, let a man account of us as the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."* Brethren, we could be willing that, for our persons, we should be held in the greatest contempt before you, if the contempt of our persons might further the glory of our work. However, we know that ordinarily, the contempt of persons hinders the honour of the work. Therefore, as the Apostle says, *"Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."*

We are appointed stewards of the mysteries of God, to deal out to you the mysteries of life and salvation. Joseph was held in high esteem when he dealt out the corn in Egypt, and now this work of reconciliation is one that even the angels long to understand. The angels learn instruction from this mystery of reconciliation. Not only does it befit the greatest men in the world to attend to it, but the angels themselves honour it and learn from it.

I will give you a text for this, as it may seem hard to comprehend. The text is in Ephesians 3:10: *"To the intent that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."* Not only do men, but even the very angels in heaven come to understand more of the wisdom of God in Christ, made known to the Church. Certainly, if the angels come to know more through the Church, it happens especially during church meetings when they gather, and when the ministry of the Gospel is dispensed among the saints. Then, when the Church is engaged in the exercises of the ordinances, they come to understand the manifold wisdom of God.

Although some may consider it foolishness, God says it is *"manifold wisdom,"* and the angels think so too. Certainly, there is no place so full of listeners as one filled with angels who come to hear. Therefore, you should come to hear, for the angels come to hear as well. The Apostle even advises women to behave properly *"because of the angels,"* and the Scripture tells us that the angels *"desire to look into"* this mystery of the Gospel.

Ministers need not seek honour for themselves in any way, but rather through their faithful administration of the Gospel. In the primitive times, ministers of the Gospel were greatly honoured by the people. When a soul comes to understand what it is to have peace with God

through Jesus Christ, through any minister's ministry, that soul will honour that ministry enough; the minister needs not call for any honour or respect from that soul.

It is said that, in former times, there were wooden chalices and golden ministers, but later, there were golden cups and wooden ministers. It was a great deal more honour to the Church when there were golden ministers, but when there came to be golden cups and ministers who were more like gallants and enjoyed great means, they might well be called "wooden" in their ability to open the mysteries of salvation to the people.

It is not now so much about preaching mere morality (though these are good things to preach on), but where is the great point of reconciliation? The great point that all ministers ought to aim at is the matter of reconciliation, and it is their commission to preach that especially. Oh, how should this be received and accepted! To us is committed the ministry of reconciliation. What is it? It is a ministry of no less consequence than your reconciliation with God. Oh, how gladly should you receive this ministry, for they come about a work that is worthy of all acceptance. As the Apostle says in 1 Timothy 1:15, *"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."* This is the essence of the ministry of reconciliation.

When we come to bring this message to you, we do not expect anything but your wholehearted acceptance, to open your hearts and hands to receive this work of reconciliation. As we read of Noah, when he was tossed up and down the sea, after many days he sent forth a dove, and she brought back an olive branch. You know that this is an emblem of peace. Noah opened the window of the ark and took in the dove with the olive branch.

Likewise, all those who come to preach the Gospel to you come with the olive branch in their mouths. You are, as it were, floating up and down on the sea, and we come to you with an olive branch in our mouths, like Noah's dove. Oh, then open your windows and receive it. As the prophet says, *"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good tidings of peace."* As you read in Romans 10:15, their very feet should be beautiful to you. This was prophesied among the prophets and is applied in the New Testament. If you find your hearts opened, accepting of it, rejoicing, and blessing God for it, then you fulfil that prophecy, and the feet of those messengers become beautiful in your eyes.

This is the purpose for which you should come when you come to hear a sermon. You should think, "This day, I am coming to hear something of the work of reconciliation between God and my soul." When people come to the Word expecting something concerning this peace with God, and when they hear such a message, they should bless the name of God. Some come to the Word to hear witty sentences and for mere discourse, though the main thing you should come to hear is about the reconciliation of God to your souls. You should watch for such a word throughout the sermon, asking, "Oh, but when will the word of peace be opened from God to my soul?" And when you hear that word, you should embrace it and receive it.

As it says in Psalm 85:8, *"I will listen to what God the Lord will say; he promises peace to his people."* So should every poor, afflicted conscience say, "I will listen today when Christ will speak peace to my soul." May the Lord, by His Word, speak peace to you and make what we preach in opening the truths of the Gospel a powerful ministry of reconciliation to your souls.

Chapter 44

I have treated the matter of what commission is given unto the ministers of the Gospel, and there is one great thing that I would have you observe, which we often overlook: how the Apostle repeatedly emphasises this, as if to suggest that it is one of the greatest things that concerns the world that ever was. For he says in verse 18, *"All things are of God; who has reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ, and has given unto us the ministry of reconciliation."*

But he had not finished with that thought; he repeats it again, *"to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world; that God reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given unto us the ministry of reconciliation."* This is in verse 18, and again, in verse 19, *"And has committed unto us the word of reconciliation,"* showing that it is a matter of great consequence; it is a great trust that is committed to the ministers of the Gospel, the word of reconciliation.

I have shown you how you are, therefore, to entertain the ministers of the Gospel. How beautiful should be the feet of those who bring glad tidings, who come from God with this commission, this doctrine of reconciliation in their mouths! As Noah put forth his hand and took in the dove with the olive branch, so when a minister comes with this olive leaf in his mouth—the ministry of reconciliation—you must open your hearts and take it in.

A word or two more about this: this, as you have heard at length, is the great work of the ministers of the Gospel: to bring to you the doctrine of reconciliation. Although it may seem like foolishness to

the world, yet it is the great ordinance by which God will bring men to be reconciled unto himself—those whom he has purposed to save. Here is now a work: to treat with you about reconciling your souls to God, to open to you the counsels of God concerning bringing you to be at peace with Him.

Use 1: See What a Wicked, Wretched World This Is, That Cannot Bear the Ministers of the Gospel

From this, we can see what a wicked and wretched world this is, that it cannot bear the ministers of the Gospel. When this is all the work they come about—this errand unto them in the name of God, to treat with them solely to make peace between God and their souls—here is all their errand, and yet the world cannot bear this.

If they came as the messengers of God's wrath against them, then indeed the world might look harshly upon them and seek to avoid them. But when they come with no other errand but merely to treat with their souls about terms of peace, that the world should not receive them, but reject the Gospel, despise it, and look upon the ministers of the Gospel as if they were their greatest enemies—this is a most wretched and wicked world. There is nothing in the world that can aggravate the sins of men more than this: that they should reject the ministry of the Gospel.

Says God, "What? When I send the ministers of the Gospel, my servants, to treat with these wretched creatures about making peace between me and them, and they shall reject this?" Certainly, God expects that wherever he sends the ministry of the Gospel, generally, all people should marvel at the grace of God that is made known to them in Christ. They should all come in and even cry out to God, "Lord, what is it that you require? What? Is there any messenger

from Heaven come? Now let us give up our hearts as blank paper; let God write in them whatever He pleases."

God does not expect that men should rise in a rage against the Word and cast it off as if it brings trouble upon them. How infinitely mistaken are men in this, to think that the preaching of the Gospel is a trouble to the world, when it is the greatest happiness that can exist in this world? And if you knew it, you would bless God for it, even with your faces to the ground, that such a commission was given to your brethren to come from God, to treat in His name about terms of reconciliation with you, the sons of men.

What harm do the ministers of the Gospel do unto men that they should be so troubled with them? That they should say, "The town or place is troubled, and we could never be at peace since there was such and such preaching"? Were it not for infinite malice, such a thought could never enter into the hearts of men.

You speak about the matter of treating for peace with God, but say that ministers are severe and denounce the judgments of God against us.

I appeal to you—how do we denounce them? Do we declare them absolutely, or only to bring souls to faith and repentance? What do we plead against? It is only against your sin, which is your enemy, your deadly enemy, and would certainly undo and destroy you eternally.

Ahab spoke of the prophet, saying, “He never speaks good unto me,” and yet said, “Have I found thee, O mine enemy?” He regarded the prophet as an enemy. So it is with wicked, carnal hearts. Though we come to reveal the mysteries of the Gospel to them, when we show them the terms upon which it stands, they think we do not speak

good to them. Certainly, whatever your thoughts may be, we are enemies to nothing but your sins, which would destroy you. Sin is your true enemy, and would anyone think it harsh to have their deadly enemy dealt with severely?

All that we desire is to break the alliance between your souls and sin so that there may be a union between God and your souls. Certainly, love for sin and peace with God cannot coexist at the same time; it is impossible for there to be a league between sin and your souls, and yet a league between God and your souls. Now, which do you think is better, and who is truly your greatest friend: the one who seeks to maintain a league with sin, or the one who seeks to break it so that you may have peace with God? This is the intention of the Gospel.

But you may say, "If this is the commission of ministers, that God has put into them the word of reconciliation, why do they preach the law as much as they do? Why do they preach terror so much, if their commission is the word of reconciliation?"

To that, I answer: Certainly, he is not a true minister who preaches the law or terror in any other way than in order to this word of reconciliation. It is solely to make you understand this word of reconciliation. Though there is (in some respects) a significant difference between the law and the Gospel, most people think the difference is greater than it truly is. The substance of the law is that which is implied (at least) in the Gospel.

When we say *the word of reconciliation,* it is impossible to open this up to you without showing you something of what the law conveys. Why? Because reconciliation implies that we are enemies to God. How are we enemies to God? It is through our sins.

How shall we know that sin brings enmity between God and us?

The law tells us, *"Cursed be everyone that does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."* When we speak of reconciliation, there is implied enmity. I appeal to any of you—considering that God works with creatures according to the nature of creatures—He works (though above reason) in a rational way. He begins the work with those He intends to save. Therefore, how can we (in a rational way) understand what reconciliation is until we understand what enmity sin has made between God and our souls? Is it possible to grasp the sweetness of peace with God until we understand the danger of our state? What we speak of in the law is implied in the Gospel so that the revelation of the Gospel may come with more sweetness and fullness into your hearts.

Oh, that you would always carry this with you when you hear any minister speak words that contain any terror. Persuade your souls of this: "Oh, but this is for the sake of my peace with God; it is to show me what a blessed and sweet Saviour Jesus Christ is."

But others will say, "The word of peace is committed unto you; why do you then speak of war?"

To that, I answer briefly: when we speak to you concerning war, what is our aim? What does it lead to? It is simply this—that you may be willing to risk your lives, your estates, and all that you have to maintain among you this word of reconciliation. This is the purpose. Were it not for this, we could quickly hold our tongues, and we would not endanger ourselves as we do in speaking to you on such a matter. It is clear to anyone, even to one whose eyes are half-open, that if we are sluggish and cowardly now, we may as well say goodbye to the word of reconciliation; the word of the Gospel would be lost, and we should not expect it to remain among us or for our future generations.

Some of you may know that since God has called a Parliament and blessed it as He has done, the word of reconciliation has never been opened so clearly as it has been now. There has been some preaching before, mingled with many mixtures; but as for the clear way of reconciliation, your consciences may tell you that it has never been so plainly revealed.

Objection: But you will say, "The Apostles had the word of reconciliation and preached it to the people, but they did not preach that the people should maintain it by force of arms. Instead, they taught the people to suffer, to lay down their lives, and not to take up the sword."

Answer: This has been answered time and again, and it is a most vain objection. The objection seems to be based partly on the matter itself. They say that religion should not be maintained by the sword, and secondly, they point to the example of the primitive times.

Firstly, regarding religion, understand that the current defence by the sword is not merely for religion but for our civil right to practice our religion. This response addresses both objections.

For the objection that religion should not be maintained by the sword, and for the matter concerning primitive times, I say that the maintenance of religion now is not the sole reason the sword is taken up. The sword is not raised purely for religion itself but for the civil right we have to practice our religion, which the Apostles and the early Christians did not have in primitive times.

We now live in a country where we have a civil right to our religion, as well as to our estates. We do not only have the right to practice our religion because God graciously gives it to us, but we also have this right by virtue of our civil laws and the laws of our commonwealth.

The same right you have to your houses, lands, and estates is the same right you have to the practice of your religion. This is a particular mercy of God towards England, more so than other countries.

Now, we take up arms to defend our civil rights, whether they pertain to our estates, houses, religion, or whatever else it may be; it remains a matter of civil rights. This is what justifies this cause and should be sufficient to silence any objections on this point and address the argument concerning the primitive times.

But I shall let this pass and proceed to the next verse.

Chapter 45.

Verse 20 Opened, and Five Doctrines Propounded

VERSE 20.
"Now then we are Ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

Now we are Ambassadors. Observe the elevation of spirit in the holy Apostle, as he declares, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself; not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us this word of reconciliation." Therefore, "Now then we are Ambassadors." His spirit seems to be greatly stirred by this truth. What? God reconciling the world unto himself? Not imputing their trespasses unto them? [Now then, we are

Ambassadors for Christ.] Now, indeed, we have a great trust; now we have a great charge; now we are Ambassadors, not from any earthly prince, but from Jesus Christ himself.

In these words, several key doctrines emerge, which I will outline as follows:

Doctrine 1:

The Ministers of the Gospel are Ambassadors of Christ.

Doctrine 2:

What they do in their embassy is as if God and Christ themselves were doing it, as though God did beseech you by us. Therefore, we pray you in Christ's stead.

Doctrine 3:

The consideration of the excellency of their commission and embassy makes them extraordinarily diligent and earnest in fulfilling the task they are sent to do: "Now we are Ambassadors, and as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled."

Doctrine 4:

God and Jesus Christ are exceedingly willing to be reconciled to sinners. This point is indeed the central matter of the text, and the very foundation of all that is intended here. It reveals that God and Christ are extremely willing for sinners to come in and be reconciled to him, for they pray and beseech you.

Doctrine 5:

The work of the Ministry of the Gospel is, by all means possible, to labour to draw people by entreating and beseeching them, and to not take "no" for an answer until they succeed in bringing them to be reconciled unto God.

These are the five main doctrines of verse 20.

"Now then, we are Ambassadors for Christ," etc.

I shall treat the first three briefly, as the latter two are the principal matters for which I chose this text. These latter doctrines will demonstrate the willingness of God that sinners should come in and be reconciled to him, as well as the role of the Ministry in drawing the hearts of the people. The first three points will be addressed as a preface to these main subjects.

Chapter 46

The Ministers of the Gospel Are Ambassadors of Christ, Opened in Six Particulars

Firstly, that the Ministers of the Gospel are the Ambassadors of Christ.

They are not Ambassadors for Belial or for Antichrist, as many Ministers have been, who plead the cause of Antichrist as if they were sent as legates from Rome, advocating superstitious vanities. We are not Ambassadors for Belial, for sin, or for wickedness, as is often heard when some plead against godliness and in favour of wickedness. No, we are Ambassadors for Christ. We are sent as Ambassadors; this role is more significant than that of mere messengers. It is a higher degree than simply being a messenger; an Ambassador is more than a steward. As stated in 1 Corinthians 4, "Therefore let a man so account of us as the Ministers of Christ, and dispensers of the mysteries of Salvation." I will provide a scriptural reference for this, open it briefly, and then move on from this point.

The term "Ambassador" appears frequently in Scripture. In Ephesians 6:20, it is mentioned similarly to how it is used here: "For which I am an Ambassador," and he was in bonds. He was not treated like an Ambassador. You know that Ambassadors, first and foremost, are individuals sent by princes and states to other princes and states. It is not a matter for private individuals. If any of you send a messenger for business, he is not considered an Ambassador. However, one who comes from a prince or state to another country is called an Ambassador. Thus, the Minister of the Gospel is not sent to mediate between man and man but between God and man in matters

that concern the great God of Heaven and Earth. Though appointed by men, their calling ultimately depends on God and Christ.

Here is the distinction: when princes and states send their Ambassadors, they are sent to other princes and states. But God sends his Ambassadors to poor, wretched, sinful men. In doing so, he honours mankind by sending a messenger from himself to be an Ambassador. When a prince sends a messenger to a person, one does not say that the prince has sent an Ambassador to someone in prison, whom he might execute at his will. Such a person would be more of an executioner than an Ambassador. Thus, we all might have expected that an executioner would be sent, but God, in his grace, sends an Ambassador for his elect.

Furthermore, Ambassadors are not sent for trivial matters. When an Ambassador is dispatched, it is for a public, state affair of great significance. Similarly, when you hear that God sends his Ambassadors to the world, you must realise that it is for a great and weighty matter, a state affair concerning Heaven itself. It concerns God more closely than anything else in this world, and it involves God's very nature and his Son, making it the matter closest to God's heart. Therefore, we are called Ambassadors.

Thirdly, they are called Ambassadors because they must ensure they do not act beyond their commission. It is as much as their life is worth to exceed their commission in any matter. In this way, the Ministers of the Gospel must strictly adhere to the commission they receive from Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, when he goes to any place, he represents the person of the King himself from whom he came, and any wrong done to him is considered as done to the King's person, regardless of how humble the Ambassador may be. Likewise, all the Ministers of the Gospel

come to you in the name of the King of Heaven, in the name of Jesus Christ, and there is a certain representation of the person of Christ in them. This will become even clearer when we come to the next point.

Fifthly, an Ambassador must give an account of his embassage; he must, as necessary, report back to the country from whence he came about the business he has conducted. Similarly, the Ministers of the Gospel, acting as Ambassadors, are constantly to send reports to Heaven about the progress of their embassage. When they declare any message to the people, they must communicate with Heaven, informing God whether the message is received or rejected. It is a very grave matter for any people when a Minister of God has just cause to send a complaint to Heaven, saying, "O Lord, thou hast sent me with a blessed embassage of peace and reconciliation to this people, but they reject it. They prefer their lusts over all the glory found in Jesus Christ; Heaven and eternal happiness are trivial matters to them." When a Minister makes such a complaint, do you not think it will be a serious matter for those who reject it? All faithful Ministers do this. If he is a faithful Minister, he is deeply concerned about his embassage; he observes whether it is accepted, and accordingly, he informs Heaven not only weekly but daily about how his embassage is received. Ultimately, on the last day, he must give a full account before the Lord and Jesus Christ.

Sixthly, and lastly, it is against the law of all nations to mistreat an Ambassador, even if he comes with a threatening message; he must still be treated civilly. In the same way, it is against all laws of religion to mistreat a Minister of the Gospel, even if he delivers a warning. How much more should he be received when he comes with an embassage of peace? It goes against all sense, reason, and religion, and those who mistreat an Ambassador sent from Jesus Christ are profane and reprobate to every good work.

Now, a few words by way of application.

Chapter 47

Use 1

The Ministers of the Gospel are sent from the greatest Prince in the world and should be regarded as such. Now, if even the feet of those who merely bring glad tidings of peace should be considered beautiful, how much more the feet of the Ambassador of peace? An Ambassador is of far greater significance than one who simply brings good news.

O, my brethren, do not give any cause for complaint, but rather provide those who come among you with a reason to send a joyful account to God. Let them be able to say, "Lord, You have been pleased to send to such a place to preach peace to such a people, and how readily, how eagerly, do these souls receive this embassage! Lord, never did any Minister enter a place where this embassage was so warmly received. They cry out for peace with You, and above all else, this is the desire of their souls: to have peace with their God."

Oh, how joyful it would be if we could report to God in this manner!

Do not cause any Minister who comes to you as the Ambassador of Christ to be like those in Isaiah 33:7. The text says (although it refers to another situation, we may apply it here): "Truly, in many congregations, there is reason for the Ambassador of peace to weep, and that bitterly." May the Lord prevent you from giving such an

occasion. Though it would be sorrowful for their hearts, it would be far more grievous for you.

Thus much from the metaphor.

Chapter 48

The Second Doctrine (Propounded in the 45th Chapter) Prosecuted

Doctrine 2: That a Minister of the Gospel, when he comes, is an Ambassador; he comes in Christ's stead, and what he delivers (according to his Commission) is to be regarded as if God, and as if Jesus Christ himself, were preaching to you.

For lack of the right understanding of this point, many sermons are lost. If people had this text in their hearts and viewed all the faithful Ministers of the Gospel as though God and Jesus Christ were present and speaking, how much good would be achieved! When God intends to do good to any soul, He will cause it to see the preaching of the Gospel as the very voice of God and Jesus Christ to the soul. Though many a poor soul (who perhaps has heard a thousand sermons) has seen preaching as merely a man's words, when the time of love finally comes, they perceive the authority and majesty of God himself and of Jesus Christ in the ministry and feel God speaking to their heart. Then it prevails.

This is evident in the text: "As though God did beseech you by us," meaning that what we do, it is as if God himself did it. And do we pray for you? It is in Christ's stead. Now, this applies not only to the

Ministers of the Gospel since Christ's time, but also to those sent by God as His messengers in the past. It was as if God and Christ acted through them.

You have proof of this in 1 Peter 3:18-19: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, by which also he went and preached to the spirits which are in prison." This passage has been misused by some to suggest that Christ's soul descended into Hell to preach to the damned, but that is certainly a misguided idea. If you observe the text closely, you will find its true meaning in verse 20: "It was to those spirits who were disobedient when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." These spirits lived in the days of Noah, and it was through Noah's preaching that Christ spoke to them. Now, they are in prison. Jesus Christ went and preached to the spirits who were disobedient during Noah's time, who are now imprisoned. How did He preach? By His Spirit, through His servant Noah. The preaching of Noah was, in essence, the preaching of Christ.

It is as if one might say, "There was a congregation many years ago that had a faithful minister; Christ was preaching to those souls who are now in prison." Sadly, they are now lost, but there was a time when Christ was preaching to them.

I will not name many more texts, but allow me to provide one or two more. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, it states, "You did not receive it as the word of man; you looked beyond man. But how did you receive it? As from God, and therefore, it works effectively." This makes the word effectually work upon the heart when people receive it as the word of God.

Also, in Galatians 4:14, note how the Galatians received the Apostle: "And my temptation which was in my flesh you despised not, nor rejected, but received me as an Angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." Here, he speaks in commendation of the Galatians, saying, "You received me as an Angel of God, even as if I were Christ Jesus." The Apostle was in a poor and humble condition with regard to his outward state: "[My temptation that was in my flesh]." In his outward appearance, he was very lowly, and this could have been a temptation for them to reject him when he spoke. Alas, this has been a temptation to many, for because the preacher is but an earthen vessel, even if he brings the true treasure of the Gospel, many are tempted to dismiss him.

But, he said, it was not so with you. You received me; though poor, weak, a mean man who had scarcely bread to eat, yet you received me as an angel of God, yea, beyond that: as Christ Jesus himself. However, you shall observe in the next words that it seems their hearts began to be drawn aside. In the 15th verse, there was a time when I first came among you, and you were ready to have plucked out your very eyes for me, and you cried out, "Oh! This blessed doctrine of the Gospel that we now hear!" But where is the blessedness now? It seems that some false teachers had come and ensnared them, taking them away from the Apostle. "Oh! Where is the blessedness you spoke of?" as if it were now gone.

But that is the duty of people, and it is only when they come to regard the ministry of the word as if God himself were speaking, as if Jesus Christ were addressing them, that any great good can be done. I will conclude with this one thought: until you come to understand this, it is unlikely that any great or substantial good will be achieved. It will be with you as it was with Samuel.

You know, God called to Samuel: "Samuel, Samuel," said God. Samuel ran to Eli. "My son," said Eli, "I did not call you." So, Samuel went again and slept, and God called once more. But Samuel did not recognise it was God's voice; he ran to Eli again. Then, the text says that Eli perceived that God had called the child, and Eli gave him this instruction: if he called again, Samuel should say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." Samuel went back to sleep, and the Lord came and called to him again. This time, Samuel said, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." Then, God opened his heart and revealed His mind to him.

Oh! God had called the first time, but Samuel thought it was Eli and looked no further. So, God said no more to him and left him, and the same happened a second time. But when Samuel understood that it was God's voice, you will observe that God wonderfully opened His heart to him and fully revealed His will.

In the same way, people today come to hear the ministry of the word. They hear a sound in their ears, and what they hear seems very good, but they only see a man; they think it is just a man speaking. They might even commend the man and praise his sermon, but all this time, God has not spoken to their hearts. Then they go a second time, and it is true that God does speak to them, but they do not recognise that it is God’s voice. Because they do not know it is God’s voice, He does not make Himself known to them.

But when the time of God’s love comes, this is the great message sent to the children of men. When He pleads with you, you should recognise that it is Christ pleading with you. When the minister is opening any Scripture to you, you should see that it is Christ himself who is opening that Scripture to you. When you come with such a heart, then God reveals His full mind to you.

I appeal to you—has it not been just so? Have God's dealings with you not been as they were with Samuel? You have come time and again to a sermon, but you have looked no further than Eli—to the minister. But when you have come to the word with a heart that says, "Lord, speak, for your servant hears. Lord, reveal what you will; I see it is your own ordinance, and though the minister may be but a poor, weak man, yet he comes and stands in your stead and speaks in your name," then you will find more in one sermon revealed to you than in a thousand before. This is the reason why many have lived thirty or forty years under a powerful ministry, and though it has sounded in their ears, they have never heard the mind of God savingly revealed to them. It is because they have never truly fallen down and said, "Lord, speak, for your servant hears." Oh! Do this, and you shall hear the great message from God. Then, God will open Himself fully to you.

Chapter 49.

The Second Doctrine (propounded in the 45th chapter) further prosecuted.

I have made some entrance into this second point. The doctrine is that God and Christ speak through the ministers of His word. What the ministers of God do (according to their rule and Word) is to be regarded as if God and Christ themselves were doing it. This is clear in the text: "As though God did beseech you, we pray you in Christ's stead," saith the Apostle.

For this, I have given you several scriptures, and I might add many more. I had thought to present some more clear scriptures to show you that what the ministers do is as if God and Christ themselves were doing it. I might name forty passages that are clear on this point but shall refrain so that I may proceed. What the ministers of God speak according to the rules, I say, is as if God and Christ spoke, and this must necessarily be true if we consider the power that Christ has in the ministry.

We have experienced that there is such power in the ministry of the word that it could only be due to God speaking in it—God and Christ within it. It has the power to enlighten, to awaken the conscience, to terrify the conscience, to humble, to bring down the proudest heart in the world, and even to convert souls. In John 5:25, the text speaks of the word of the Son of God that brings life: "Verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." Certainly, this is spoken not only of the voice of the Son of God at the general resurrection but also in the ministry of the word. "The hour is coming, and now is," when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live. It was true at that time, and it continues to be true in the ministry of the word today. There is the voice of the Son of God that makes the dead hear and live.

Further, the word of the ministry must be regarded as God's in this respect; otherwise, there could not be any foundation for faith in what is delivered through the ministry of the word. We know that the ministry of the word is the special ordinance appointed for the begetting of faith: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word preached." It does not come so much by reading, not even by reading the book of God—the Scriptures—but by hearing the word preached.

Now, you may say, indeed, the word in the Bible is the word of God. God speaks there, and Christ speaks there, and we may base our faith on what we read. But we must have something to base our faith upon when we hear it preached by man, just as when we read it. It is clear from Scripture that God works more often through the hearing of it preached than by the reading of it. Unless we regard it as the word of God and Christ, we have nothing to base our faith upon, for nothing human can be the foundation and ground of anyone's faith.

It is not the judgment of a man (no matter how learned or holy he may be) that can ground my faith. But when I come to hear him, and I hear God and Christ speaking through him, then I have something to base my faith upon. This is why so many hear sermons, are moved at the moment, but are not grounded or established in the truth; they hear only the voice of man and do not hear God. But when people can say, as those men from Samaria said to the woman in John 4, "Here is a man who told me all that I ever did; is not he the Christ?" They went out to see him, but eventually said to her, "Now we believe, not because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves."

So may many a soul say, "I have often heard sermons, and I have been moved by the preaching of such a man, and I did believe what he said, and it affected my heart to some degree. But now," says the soul, "I do not believe because he tells me this; I have heard, in his preaching, God and Christ themselves. It has not been him, but Jesus Christ who has spoken to my heart." There could be no foundation for our faith unless what is delivered in the ministry of the word is regarded as God and Christ speaking through them.

Objection: You may say, "Must we believe everything that the preacher speaks, as if God and Christ were speaking it? Men can err."

Therefore, you must compare what you hear with what you read, just as the noble Bereans did when they searched the Scriptures to see if what Paul himself preached was true. They were not to accept Paul's preaching without examining it, and they were commended for doing so. God forbid that we should think it strange that people examine what we say. "Try all things, and hold fast that which is good." Search the Scriptures, and compare what is delivered with Scripture, and then, insofar as what is spoken aligns with the rule of Scripture (even if it is not directly quoting the words of Scripture), when it is spoken in the name of God and according to Scripture, it should be received as if God and Christ themselves had spoken it.

We claim no such infallibility as the Papists attribute to the Pope, but we grant all people the liberty to examine our doctrine by Scripture. Then, God expects, and Christ expects, that it should be received as if God and Christ were speaking.

Chapter 50.

Use 1. Answering the Objections of the Arminians and the Wantons of our Age.

Now then, briefly, hence we have a use of instruction where we have an answer to the objection both of the Arminians and of our late wantons. The Arminians make this objection: when we preach (sometimes) that all men are naturally dead in sins and trespasses, and there is no free will in man, but man is as void of grace as the dead carcass that lies in the grave is void of natural life. Now they

say, if men are so dead in sins, why do you preach to them? Would it not be a vain thing to go and preach in the churchyard? Would they regard what you say? You preach that all are dead, and that there is no life at all in men to do any good—why do you speak to them? This point answers that objection.

Though it is true that all men are naturally dead in sins, and are, before the Lord, as a dead carrion; there is no dead carrion more loathsome in our eyes than every natural soul is in the eyes of God. Yet we come and preach to them. Why? Because in our preaching, it is God—God and Christ—who speaks. Though our voice has no power to raise from the dead, the voice of God has power to raise from the dead. If Christ will speak to one who is dead, he shall come forth. As you know, in the 11th chapter of John, when Christ came to Lazarus, he said, "I say to thee, Lazarus, arise." It would be a vain thing for any of us to go to the grave and say, "arise," but if Christ comes, he can raise them immediately. So, we preach to a congregation that is mixed, some who have lain in the grave of sin perhaps for forty years together. Yet when we speak in the name of Christ, and Christ speaks together with us, we may speak to dead souls, for together with the word that is spoken, there goes a power and a life, for it is the word of God (and not the word of man) that breathes forth life.

And again, it is an answer to the objection of our late wantons. They cry out against ministers calling on men for duties and consider them as "duty-mongers." They say, "Why do you call men to act? You tell them they must do this and that, and they must perform duties and humble themselves." They think they have a great objection in this: that because men have no power naturally, therefore it is a vain thing to call upon them to perform duties.

This answers them: we call upon them as with the voice of Christ. Though they have no power themselves, we call upon them to set upon such duties; we call upon them to believe and to repent. They say it is in vain to call upon them to believe and repent. But the way that God works faith and repentance in the heart of man is to convey a power through His own voice in the ministry of His word. Therefore, we speak to them to believe and repent, as if they had power, because we know that those who belong to God's election, the Lord will convey power to them through this word of His. It is not our voice, but it is the voice of God and of Jesus Christ.

We would have you carry this meditation along with you, at any time when we speak to you and exhort you to come in, to repent, and to believe. Carry this meditation with you, and then you shall understand us aright. We would not have you think that we assume you have power to believe and repent simply because we call upon you. But this we expect: that, while we are speaking to you, God and Christ will speak to your hearts so that there will be power conveyed through that word of ours. And though it may not be conveyed in this sermon, yet it may be in the next or the next, and we hope in the end that it will give repentance unto life.

Chapter 51.

Use 2. Ministers Ought to Speak as the Oracles of God. The Manner of Their Preaching Opened.

The next use that arises from hence is that which the Apostle Peter makes in 1 Peter 4:11, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." Mark it, here is an exhortation to those who have to deal in the ministry of the word: that they must, when they speak the word, speak it as the oracles of God. So that which is delivered in the word, you see it to be as the oracles of God. Whatsoever a minister speaks (according to Scripture) is to be looked upon as the oracles of God.

Now, therefore, if this be so, that the word which is spoken (according to the rule) is the oracles of God, then it is the duty of all who do speak the word of God to speak it in such a manner as it may appear to be the oracles of God. I have not now to speak to many ministers, and therefore I shall not enlarge myself in this as I otherwise might have done.

Oh! With what reverence should ministers speak, for they come to speak as in Christ's stead, and therefore they should speak in such a manner as befits the voice of God and of Jesus Christ—as the oracles of God. They should not think to speak according to their own fancies, humours, and in their own ways, but to speak as those sent in God's place, to speak to the people as if Christ were speaking to them. Therefore, they must consider they are in the place of Christ and so speak with all authority as from Christ, as in Matthew 7, the last verse. It is said of Christ, "That he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." For a minister of God is to preach in Christ's stead (as the Apostle saith), and therefore he is to labour what he can to express the very authority of Jesus Christ in his ministry.

There is a ministry that carries authority with it in the very consciences of men. I have known of some who have come proudly into a congregation to scorn at the word—profane people who have

come on purpose to confront the ministry and the word—yet they have met with such authority in the word that their hearts have been daunted, and they have fallen under the power of the word.

There is a great deal of difference in the manner and way of preaching the word; some have authority, and others have no authority at all in it. [That kind of preaching that aims to please the humours of men]—you will find some preachers who pander to men's fancies, as it were; who have some fine, quaint words, whose sentences are very smooth, and who seem to come off elegantly. They are considered "dainty" preachers and will often use many fine Latin sentences and witty speeches, coming into the pulpit as though they were to act a part upon the stage. These are the fine, quaint preachers, the court preachers (as they are called).

But this is not to preach as in Christ's stead. It is very likely that this was the kind of preaching of the scribes and Pharisees. But when Christ came to speak, he spoke as one who had authority, not as the scribes. There was a great difference between his preaching and that of the scribes. He came with the authority of God; he came to preach to the consciences of men and not to the fancies of men. And just as there was this difference in him, so there is in some measure and degree even now. There are some who preach (to this very day) just as the scribes did, but there are others who preach as Christ did, preaching to the conscience and the hearts of people. Their words stick in the consciences of men; though they may fret, vex, and go away in a rage, yet something sticks to their consciences, so that they are either forced to yield to it or flee from it.

And this is the reason that many a man will cry out and say, "I will never hear such a minister." Why? What is the reason? His corrupt heart cannot bear that minister's preaching; the word comes with

power to his heart, and his guilty conscience cannot bear it. Now observe whether there is not some vile guiltiness in the spirits of those who say of such men that they will never hear them anymore. It is because their corrupt hearts cannot bear the authority of the word. That preaching which is as if God and Christ spoke it is with authority and not with fine, quaint words.

To this purpose, you have an expression in 1 Corinthians 1:17: "[For Christ sent me]... not with wisdom of men." Christ did never send me to preach with the wisdom of men.

What a text is here! How will many men be able to answer this one text, who make it their great study to gain the wisdom of words? But mark the danger of this: *lest the Cross of Christ be made of no effect*. There is a most hideous wickedness in this—that a man should care more about being commended for being a fine, witty, neat, smooth preacher than he should care about the Cross of Christ taking effect, or having Christ be honoured. We find by experience that such preaching scarcely ever stirs the soul and seldom, if ever, works upon the heart.

It was once said by a prelate who was not the best, but one quite ill-famed and known to many (I suppose here). I heard it with my own ears. He said that he was convinced so far that when he came to present someone to a town, he asked if there were any in the place who desired others. "Yes," said they, "there are some who desire a university man to come to them." But he replied, "The preaching there will not humble a soul, nor does it tend to humiliation." I heard this even from one whom I know was not a friend to powerful preaching, yet his conscience was so far convinced. Because the wisdom of words and learning is often shown, that kind of preaching of the Gospel makes the Cross of Christ of no effect.

Your flaunting preachers—when do they ever convert a soul? Therefore (says the Apostle), if we preach so as to do good, it must be such preaching as is described in the 18th verse. It must be foolishness to wicked men, but to those who are saved, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Wicked, carnal men will say, "There is no scholarship, no learning in such a sermon." Well, it is foolishness to them, but to those who are saved, it is the power of God unto salvation. A humble person might say, "I know not what they say, but I find a power in it. My eyes were never opened until now, my heart was never worked upon until now." To those who are saved, it is the power of God. If you find a power in it, that which wicked men call foolishness, it is a good argument that you are one who shall be saved when it quickens you.

And again, in the 19th verse: *For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.'* All their grandiosity shall come to nothing. And then in the 23rd verse: *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.* And then again, in the 2nd chapter, verse 1: *And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of (man's) wisdom.* You might say it was because Paul could not—no, Paul was an admirable scholar, a most eloquent man; he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. And yet this man came not with excellency of speech or wisdom of words, declaring to them the excellencies of God. For, says he in the 2nd verse, *I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified,* etc.

This makes the word powerful when it comes in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit and not with enticing words of man's wisdom, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man but

in the power of God: *Howbeit we speak wisdom among those that are perfect*. There is wisdom in preaching.

You may ask, "Why? Should preachers be fools?"

No, God forbid. There should be the greatest wisdom that can be, and this is no warrant for one to come into the pulpit and speak extempore. We do not come to justify a raw and empty discourse that has nothing in it but mere words and noise, with no solidity. No, let ministers study and labour to be as solid as they can, search into the mysteries of the Gospel, and open the secrets of God; in doing so, it will prevail with the consciences of men. If ministers have any gifts, there is enough matter to express the abilities of those who are most capable, and it requires their study. And so, the Apostle would have Timothy to study, and therefore, it is no justification for those who do not study.

But we must remember that we come to speak in Christ's stead. Christ certainly did not come with empty words, but He came to open the counsels of His Father, and He revealed the great mysteries of the Gospel in a solid way. So too did the Apostles; what they spoke was weighty and substantial (though it was not with vain words and phrases, as I mentioned before).

But I bring this up not to direct my speech so much to ministers as to you, the people. Seeing that this is our point—that God and Christ speak in the ministry of the word—therefore you should desire and favour such a kind of ministry wherein God speaks most, wherein Christ speaks most, where you can hear the voice of God and of Christ.

I know of no argument that more fully reveals the difference between a carnal heart and a gracious, spiritual heart than this: what kind of

ministry does your heart most savour and relish? Hereby, you may know the temper of your hearts. One may discern the state of the body by knowing what food one savours most, so too may we understand the temper of the heart by knowing what spiritual food it relishes most. If you relish frothy, empty words, your heart is accordingly inclined. But if you savour and appreciate a spiritual ministry that comes with the power and authority of God and Christ, that speaks to your heart and conscience, this is an evidence and sign of a gracious disposition in your heart.

The truth is, in one who has fallen away (or in a great measure is distanced) from God, if there be any sparks of grace remaining, they will appear in this as much as in anything else: that though his heart has grown more distant than it once was, still, he cannot help but acknowledge that he finds more power in a spiritual ministry than in any other. But those with carnal hearts will savour and relish a ministry that is mere words, one that has the least of God and Christ. Where there is little of God and Christ in the heart, there, the ministry with the least of God and Christ is most appreciated.

Some women, and some who are ignorant, if they hear a sermon with a great deal of Greek and Latin that they cannot understand, they go away and commend it, even though they understood nothing of it. I have heard an excellent story of a poor beggar (in Queen Elizabeth's time) who heard a sermon at the Court and listened to many Latin sentences and eloquent speeches. The poor beggar followed the minister as he was leaving and blessed God, saying, "Oh! Master Doctor, I bless God, and thank Him with all my heart." The minister turned around and asked him, "What is the matter?" "Oh! Master Doctor," says he, "I hope the old religion is coming in again."

But have not the prelates silenced those men who worked most upon the heart and conscience? If any preached in such a way that their ministry became powerful and prevailed upon the hearts and consciences of men, the prelates would not allow them to remain.

Chapter 52.

How to know what kind of Ministry God speaks most in.

Now you will say, "How shall I know what kind of ministry it is wherein God speaks most?"

For the answer to that, I appeal to your consciences: what kind of preaching do you think, in your consciences, there would be if Christ himself were preaching to you? How do you think that Christ himself would preach if he were here upon the earth? That which comes closest to how Christ would preach—that is what you must favour, certainly. Christ would not preach to defend superstitious vanities. When Christ came to preach, he did so in such a way that many people derided and scorned him. On one occasion, after he had finished his sermon, they carried him to the brow of the hill of the city, intending to throw him off and break his neck. Just read that sermon of Christ in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. What kind of preachers do you think would compare to your courtiers if Christ were preaching to you? That which comes nearest to what Christ would preach is what you should most favour and appreciate.

Secondly, consider what kind of preaching you think, in your conscience, most prevails in the authority of the word, humbling the most hearts and converting the most souls—what Christ has set his seal upon. I appeal to you: what kind of preaching has humbled the most souls and done the most good? Has not some poor country preacher, who has preached with evidence and demonstration of the Spirit, converted more souls to God than a hundred bishops? So much so that he may be able to say, at the great day of judgment (according to his measure), as our blessed Saviour said, "Here am I, and those whom thou hast given me."

Thirdly, examine which side you are on. Those who are on God's side know His voice; "My sheep hear my voice," but a stranger they will not follow. Take any town, and divide the people, and see how the minister is regarded; some are for him, and some against him. Now, consider the difference in the lives of these two groups—the ones who support the minister and those who oppose him. See how differently they live. Come into a place such as this (because it is said there are a thousand alehouses belonging to this place, Stepney); I think there are hardly five that savour the ministry of the word. All your profane ones, in general, speak against the ministers.

Now I appeal to your consciences: if you were to stand before God on the day of judgment, on which side would you be? Would you be on the side of drunkards, swearers, unclean persons, and those who rail against the ministry of the word, or on the side of those who are willing to make an effort to hear the word of God and bless God for the ministry of His word? Certainly, that preaching which has the most of Christ in it is most appreciated by those who have the Spirit of Christ, for they recognise His voice, and a stranger's voice they will not follow. They can understand it, even though the wicked and ungodly cannot. That is the second use.

Chapter 53.

USE 3. We should delight in the Word.

A third use of the point is this: Is the ministry of the Word such that it has God and Christ speaking in it? Oh, then! How should we delight in it? How should we bless God for it? With what eagerness should we come to hear at any time? What, is not the voice of Jesus Christ sweet to us? We have Christ wooing us, Christ exhorting us, and Christ comforting us. When we come to the Word, O! with what readiness and cheerfulness should we come to hear the voice of Christ?

If you are godly, Christ delights in your voice when you are alone in your closet and can speak but brokenly. O then! your voice is delightful to him. Therefore, the voice of Christ should be very delightful to you. I will give you a text or two as proof of this: *Canticles (Song of Solomon) 2:14*, it is a speech of Christ to the Church: "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs: let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." O! let me hear thy voice, my dove; O! thou that art in the secret places of the stairs; art thou alone in a place of prayer, alone behind the door in the secret places? (For it is spoken here of the state of the Church in times of persecution, when they dare not come together openly, no matter how wicked people will rail at them, saying they gather in corners to do this or that.) But saith Christ, "Thou that art in the

clefts of the rocks, in the secret places of the stairs, let me hear thy voice; for thy voice is sweet, and thy countenance is comely."

Again, in *Canticles 4:11*: "Thy lips drop as the honeycomb, O my spouse!" When the saints speak of Christ or speak to Christ, their lips drop before him as the honeycomb. Now, what an argument is this? Shall your lips be so sweet to Christ, and shall not Christ's lips be as sweet to you? The ministry of the Word is as if Christ were entreating you and beseeching you. O! How sweet should it be to you if you have the Spirit of Christ! The Church of Christ answers what Christ said of her lips, her voice, and her mouth. So, the Church answers to Christ in *Canticles 5*. Notice what the Church says of his mouth: what an echo and an answer to prayer! Christ says to the Church, "Thy lips, O my spouse, are as the honeycomb." And the Church responds, "And thy mouth, O my Saviour, is most sweet."

In *John 3:29*, it says, "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice." If you are the spouse of Christ, you will rejoice to hear the voice of the bridegroom, and every time you come to hear a sincere sermon, you come to hear the very voice of the bridegroom, and you cannot help but rejoice in it. O! How sweet is one word of Christ to a gracious heart? The spiritual communion with Christ here on earth is through his ordinances; we shall later be always in his presence and see his face. But if you would have any evidence that we shall have communion with him in heaven, we must rejoice in hearing his Word.

Chapter 54.

USE 4. If God and Christ speak in the Word, how dreadful ought it to be to the neglecters, disobeyers, and despisers of the Word?

If God and Christ do speak in the ministry of His Word, then, oh! what a dreadful point this is to all who neglect, disobey, and despise the ministry of the Word. You who neglect the Word, oh! what are you doing when you neglect it? You are turning your back on Jesus Christ and refusing to hear Him. Therefore, consider the scripture: *He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination* (Proverbs 28:9). What, do you turn away your ear from hearing the Word? God declares that He will turn away His ear from hearing your prayers, and your prayers shall be abominable, for you have turned away your ear from hearing Christ speak to your soul. For it is in Christ's stead (says the Apostle) that the ministry speaks.

There will be a time when you would eagerly wish for God to hear you. As you wish for God to hear you then, so you must hear Him now. Take note of that text in *Proverbs 1:24* concerning those who turn away their ear from hearing God speak: *Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof*. Though you may have thought it was merely the word of a man, you have disregarded all my counsel and refused my reproof. Your hearts fretted and were vexed because you were reproved by such a man, but it is my reproof, says God. And mark the judgement that follows in verse 26: *You shall call, and I will not answer*. There was a time, friend, when I called to you through such a sermon, and you knew that I spoke to your heart, but you turned a

deaf ear to me. You shall call with all your heart, and I will not hear you.

There will come a time when you will call upon God's ministers to pray for you. What, would you have God hear His ministers for you, and will you not hear His ministers speaking from God? It was a saying of Ambrose to Emperor Theodosius, "Will you not hear me, seeing that you desire that I should be heard for you?" You wish, said he, that I should be heard for you, and therefore you ought to be willing to hear me. This was Ambrose's speech to Theodosius after he had committed a great sin and was being reproved. So I say to all who live in any way of sin: hear God's ministers now, for a day will come when you will be glad if God hears His ministers for you. Oh! Hear us when we come in the name of God. We would not have you hear us if we spoke only our own fancies. This is a warning to those who neglect the Word.

Now a word or two to those who disobey the Word; they set their own judgments against those of the ministers, and, let him say what he will, they dismiss it as merely his opinion. Do you understand what you are doing? This rebellion is against God and against Christ. It is as though there is a language in your hearts saying, "Christ says, 'I will have this done,' but your lusts say they will have something else done." Oh! This will be charged against you one day—that the voice of the devil was stronger with you than the voice of Christ.

But it is especially contemptible to scorn the Word, to set at naught God's counsels, to walk away and despise it. Do you know what you are doing? Let me apply two scriptures to you, you who despise and scorn the Word, who can go into company and talk about what you have heard in a contemptuous manner. Consider these two texts, I pray you. First, consider the text from which this point is raised—

about God speaking to you, whom you despise. Think about the text in *Isaiah 37:23*. When you gather with others and become emboldened by wine, oh! Then you lift up your voice and laugh. But against whom have you lifted up your voice? You think it is against Hezekiah, but no—it is against the Holy One of Israel. You think it is against a man who preached on such and such a day, but no, it is against the Holy God and Jesus Christ. This is recorded against you in Heaven: here is one who has reproached the Holy One and Jesus Christ.

In *Luke 10:16*, it says, *He that hears you, hears me…* That applies not only to the disciples who were then on earth but to all faithful ministers to the end of the world. For Christ said, when He sent them out, *I will be with you to the end of the world*. They have been dead for more than a thousand years, yet Christ promised to be with those who succeed them to the end of the world. This text concerns every faithful minister as much as it did Christ's disciples. Every time you despise the ministry of His Word, you despise Jesus Christ and God, His Father.

For the Lord's sake, take heed of what you do. When you have to deal with the Word, you are dealing with a sharp instrument; it is that which will either save you or destroy you forever. You who have been guilty of neglecting the Word, may the Lord strike and humble your hearts. For comfort in the time to come, I will apply one more scripture to you, and that is found in *Hebrews 12:25*: *See that you do not refuse him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from him who speaks from Heaven.*

The ministry of the Gospel and the ministry of the Law are compared here: one speaks from earth, and the other from Heaven, though, in

truth, they both come from Heaven. But now, in the ministry of the Gospel, God has sent His own Son to you. In these latter days, He has spoken by His Son, as the Apostle says in *Hebrews 1:1–2*: *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son*. In former times, God spoke by His prophets—there was the voice of God (though it wasn't as clear that it was the voice of God, even though Christ did speak through them). But now, in these days, God has spoken by His Son, and He has reserved the ministry of His grace and His eternal counsels concerning the children of men for His Son—not just His Son personally, but His Son through the ministry of His Word.

You might say, "If Christ did preach (as you say He does), there would be more power." But remember, when Christ preached, even the Pharisees derided Him. In the original text, it means they 'sneered' at Him, and note this: those who were covetous mocked Him—they even mocked Jesus Christ Himself. A worldly heart that has become rich, rising from a lowly state to a greater one, will mock the most excellent preaching in the world.

Take heed that you do not despise the ministry, for certainly, the voice of Christ will prevail one day. If it does not prevail here in the Word, it shall prevail one day when Christ says, *Depart from me, ye cursed*. Though you do not obey the present voice of Christ, you will obey His voice on that day. I must conclude this point with a word of exhortation.

Chapter 55.

How We Ought to Hear the Word

Use 1.

Since God and Christ speak to us in the ministry of the Word, let us come with different thoughts to hear it than we have done before. I recall mentioning earlier that the Word cannot be effective until we recognise the voice of Christ in it, as with Samuel. I will provide another text to illustrate the profound effect it can have on the hearts of men and women if they come to hear the preaching of the Word as the voice of God and Christ. This is found in *Acts 10:33*. There, you will see that Cornelius had sent for Peter to come to him immediately: *Therefore I sent to thee, and thou hast well done that thou art come; now therefore are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*

Here is a gracious disposition of heart in Cornelius, a soldier, and other soldiers and friends he had gathered. As soon as Peter arrived, Cornelius said, "We are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God, and we all will accept whatever you reveal to us from God as the Word of God." With such reverence and affection, they attended as though they were eager to understand the mind of God. This encouraged Peter, and when people behave with such reverence, it greatly encourages any preacher.

And then, as soon as Peter finished his sermon—or even before he had completed it—the text says in verse 44 that *while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all them which heard the Word*. No wonder, as they came with such a disposition of heart! *We are all here to know and hear what is commanded of God*. With this

frame of spirit, the Holy Spirit fell on those who heard the Word, and the same will happen with you if you come with such a heart.

When you are alone before you come, say, “Oh Lord! That you would speak to my heart,” just as it is written in *Isaiah 2*. There is an excellent speech for those who are about to hear, in *Isaiah 2:2*. It prophesies about the times of the Gospel and presents a noble resolution, an excellent attitude for people about to hear sermons: *Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord; to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths*.

“We are all here to hear what God will say to us.” Whenever any truth is made known to you, you should receive it with such affection: “God has revealed something of His mind to me today that I did not understand before.” And when you hear of any sin being revealed, you should bless God and say, “The Lord has confronted my heart today.” Think of it not as an evil but as a blessing that Christ would consider you.

If there is an exhortation to any duty, consider that God and Jesus Christ have exhorted you this day. You should regard it as though God and Christ have been persuading and exhorting you. And if there is any word of comfort or promise applied to you, you should accept it as if God and Jesus Christ have spoken that word of comfort to your heart today. Oh! If you would come with such a disposition to receive everything from God and Jesus Christ, then you may expect the Holy Spirit to fall upon you.

No wonder that when people come out of habit, merely because others come, or for some other vain reason, they leave without feeling any work of the Holy Spirit. But those who come with teachable hearts may expect that the Holy Spirit will come and fall

upon them. When the very people of Nineveh repented, they believed God, and thus, even the proudest, hardest heart in the world, if it comes to believe God, will repent.

I am willing to be more extensive on this point because this sermon might make many other sermons profitable, and for lack of a true understanding of this point in your hearts, many sermons do so little good.

Chapter 56.

The Third Doctrine (Proposed in the 45th Chapter) Explored: The Excellence of the Gospel Makes Ministers Earnest in Their Ministry

The former part of this verse treated several conclusions within it. A third doctrine proposed in the 45th Chapter is:

That the consideration of the excellence of the Gospel that is committed to its ministers to preach makes those who are faithful very earnest in their ministry.

"Now unto us is committed the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead," etc. It is this—the fact that the word of reconciliation is committed to us, and that we pray in Christ's stead—that drives the earnestness you see in us.

Firstly, the consideration of the excellence of the Gospel committed to its ministers should compel them to be earnest in their ministry and to labour with all their might to draw people to the love of the Gospel.

What you have heard in this chapter is repeated at the beginning of the next. The Apostle, reiterating that the ministry of reconciliation is committed to them, states that he beseeches and prays in Christ's stead. Then, as if he had not said enough, he repeats himself at the beginning of the next chapter: "Oh, this ministry of reconciliation! It is the grace of God unto people. We beseech you," says the Apostle, "do not receive this grace of God in vain." The Apostles, as well as other faithful ministers, do not satisfy themselves merely by performing a task. It's not enough just to speak for an hour, saying things that please the ears of their listeners. Instead, they are watchful and earnest, fearing that their efforts might be in vain. "We are ambassadors," they say.

Let me show you another remarkable text, found in *Colossians 1:25*: "I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God, which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God." Then he goes on to commend this ministry, calling it "the mystery that has been hidden from ages and generations but is now made manifest to the saints." It may be that carnal hearts view it as a foolish or unsavoury thing, but it is made manifest to the saints, to whom God would make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles.

Now observe how our point comes into play in verse 28. The Apostle is eager to win every man and is unwilling to lose even one of his listeners: *"every man, every man, every man"*—he repeats it three times in a single verse. He says, "Whereunto I labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." What phrases are piled up here? I do not treat the work of the ministry as an idle task, wandering from one company to another or from tavern to tavern all week and then expecting to preach to you on the Lord's day as if it were a trivial matter. Instead, it is my labour, and not only so, but I strive. And how does he strive? Not merely with human

strength, but beyond that: "I labour, striving according to his working." It is, as I confess, the word of God, and my labour and striving is according to His working. But even this is not enough: "according to His working, which works in me mightily." The work of God that works in me mightily is the measure of my labour.

Again, in his letter to the Thessalonians, the first Epistle, *2:2-4*, he writes: "Oh, this is the trust that is committed unto us; we are approved of God to be put in trust with the Gospel; even so, we speak, not as pleasing men, but God." We are upright and cannot be anything but faithful in this great trust committed to us. He then tells them in verse 8, "We were willing to impart our own souls, because we knew this Gospel would be so excellent."

I could be very extensive on this subject, but I will provide the foundation in just a few words.

Chapter 57.

Reasons for the Earnestness of Faithful Ministers

1. Their Love for God,

2. Their Love for Jesus Christ,

3. Their Love for the Souls to Whom They Preach,

4. A Kind of Love for Themselves

Those who have been entrusted with the Ministry of Reconciliation, such as the Apostles (having it committed to them), bear the responsibility of the Ministry of Reconciliation.

Reason 1

Firstly, what makes them so earnest is the love they have for God. They know that this is the great glory of God; it shines most brightly in the Ministry of Reconciliation, which they are tasked with declaring to the world. Except the Lord receives His glory in this work (truly), He has His glory in nothing else by comparison. Therefore, that they might testify to their love for God, they strive for the glory of the God whom their souls love, in what is indeed His glory and His masterpiece of all His works. This is what makes them earnest. They think, "If the Lord does not have His glory here, where shall He have His glory?" Oh! It is an infinite pity that such a great work, wherein so much of the glory of God appears, should result in the Lord receiving no glory.

Reason 2

Again, there is their dear love for Jesus Christ. Every faithful minister of Christ bears a deep affection for Jesus Christ and longs for Him to be exalted in the world. Now, there is nothing that lifts up Jesus Christ in the world as much as the Ministry of the Gospel. Those who have any love for Christ and know what He has done for them desire to lift up His name. Besides, the honour of this work itself urges them on, for it is the Ministry of Reconciliation, and it is an honourable task. Hence, the Apostle Paul in *Romans 15* uses a notable expression for this purpose, acknowledging the honour of the work. It is the Ministry of the Gospel. In verse 20, the word in Greek, "φιλοτιμέομαι" (*philotimeomai*), signifies "to love the honour of

something." Those who understand the language will recognise that it means having a deep desire for the honour of it. Paul says, "I was ambitious to preach the Gospel" (that is the phrase), and it could be translated as, "I was eager to preach the Gospel." So, Paul was not ambitious for great wealth, or to be esteemed, powerful, a Justice of Peace, a Lord, or the like (as many ministers of late have been); his ambition was to preach the Gospel, seeing that as the greatest privilege any of the sons of men could desire in the world.

Reason 3

And then again, the consideration of the Ministry of the Gospel makes them earnest out of love for their brethren and the souls of the people to whom they preach. They know that souls are utterly undone unless they come to know God in Jesus Christ and have the mystery of the Gospel revealed to them. Whatever excellences they may have in this world, whatever natural gifts or abilities they possess, they remain lost, undone, and miserable creatures forever. It would have been better for them never to have been born or never to have breathed the air unless Jesus Christ is revealed to them. Now, it is impossible for anyone who understands the necessity of the revelation of Christ not to be earnest and faithful in the work of the Ministry if the Ministry of the Gospel is committed to him.

Reason 4

There may be some argument from love towards themselves, for those who have had the Ministry of the Gospel committed to them. In some sense, God permits them to love themselves, and they cannot love themselves in any way more than by being earnest in the Ministry.

Firstly, if they are faithful in the Ministry of the Gospel, and God goes along with them (as He will if they remain faithful), then oh, how many souls shall bless them! Even if, in a single sermon, they work upon a few souls, perhaps in a strange place, they shall hear those souls blessing God for them every time they enter God's presence. Now, what a wonderful encouragement this is for a minister to be diligent in the work of the Ministry of the Gospel. This is a far greater honour than to have a bishopric; to have but one soul bless God for them, whom God has been pleased to work upon through their ministry, is an immense privilege.

And this is no more than what we can rightly expect—that, if we are privileged to be the humble instruments of God to reveal Christ to any of your souls, you should always remember us before the throne of grace. That the blessing of your prayers should be upon us is a tremendous encouragement, urging us to be earnest—not merely in making a sermon but in striving to reveal the mysteries of Christ to your souls. As you bless Christ here, so, by this means, those who are faithful will be able to give a good account at the day of Jesus Christ and shall be able to behold the face of Christ when He appears, who is the great Shepherd of their souls.

He will come with His visitation one day, and when that day arrives, it will not be those who have simply read service or worn surplices every day who shall find encouragement. Rather, those who have been faithful in the work of the Ministry of the Gospel will be able to look upon His face with joy, and those to whom they have ministered will be their joy and their crown at that day. In *Philippians 2:16*, the Apostle exhorts the Philippians (amongst other exhortations) that they should hold forth the word of life. "Do thus and thus," he says, "manifest the power of the Gospel in your lives, that I may rejoice in

the day of Jesus Christ, that I have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain."

It is an appeal to encourage people to embrace the Gospel, that they may repay those who labour among them with this reward: that they may have joy in the day of Jesus Christ, being able to come to Christ and say, "Blessed Saviour, here am I, and those whom Thou hast given me." There are reasons enough for this. Therefore, I will pass on from the point, brethren, only to add this.

Chapter 58.

Use 1: The Horrible Wickedness of Those Who Are Idle in the Ministry

First, you may see what a horrible wickedness it is for anyone who takes upon themselves to be ministers of the Gospel, yet remains idle. To be an idle shepherd, to be unfaithful in this calling, is a most detestable wickedness. Of all the people in the world, those men who have given themselves over to wickedness are the ones who bear the weight of the Ministry of the Gospel upon their shoulders, yet remain idle.

Oh, it is woeful that such a man was ever born, who would take upon himself such a glorious ministry as the Ministry of the Gospel, and yet be negligent in preaching, or by leading a scandalous life, cause harm to others. It would have been better if he had never been born. As the Apostle says, "Woe to me if I do not preach." Likewise, they

may say, “Woe to us if we are negligent in this, and woe to us if, by our scandalous lives, we hinder the fruit of our own preaching, as well as that of other men.” But we shall let that pass.

Chapter 59.

Use 2

In the second place, labour to inform yourselves of this: when you see any faithful minister earnest in the work of his ministry, understand the reason behind it. Perhaps some of you wonder why he cannot be content as others are. Know where the foundation lies—it is in this: it is the Ministry of the Gospel that is committed to him. He knows it is a glorious ministry, he sees much of Jesus Christ in it, and the glory of God shines through it. If he is faithful and possesses any love for Christ, the saints, and their souls, it is impossible for him not to be earnest in it.

Paul was so earnest that the people thought him mad, even in this very chapter where my text is taken, in verse 13. “You may think we are beside ourselves; well, it is for your sake, and it is the love of Christ that constrains us. We cannot help but do what we do,” as the Apostle Peter says in another place. So says any faithful minister: “Think of it what you will, we cannot but speak of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; we must share what we have seen and what we have heard from the Ministry of the Gospel ourselves.” It is the love of Christ that compels us. As stated in verse 11, “Knowing

therefore the terror of the Lord (and much more, the grace of the Lord), we persuade men."

If God would but convince you of this—that when you hear anything of the mystery of the Gospel opened to you, and any earnestness of spirit manifested in it, if you were convinced that the source and principle of it is this—the apprehension of the glory of this ministry (as it is such an excellent ministry)—then it is because all faithful ministers of God are so earnest in the ministration of it. It would have a greater impact on your hearts to receive what is delivered in such a manner. But we let that pass and come to what is the main point in the text.

Chapter 60.

The Fourth Doctrine (Propounded in the 45th Chapter)

That God and Christ are exceedingly willing and desirous to be reconciled to sinners.

"As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God."

You will not find in any scripture (that I know) a more fully expressed and earnest desire of Jesus Christ to be reconciled with sinners than here. This expression is (in the manner of men) to convey the earnestness of God's heart in His desire to be reconciled with sinners, and that is our point of doctrine. Our doctrine shall be

the scope of these expressions, not just the very words, but their intention and meaning. It is this:

Doctrine 4: That God and Jesus Christ are exceedingly willing and very desirous to be reconciled with sinners.

Now, the task is to demonstrate this in various manifestations, showing the willingness and desire that God and Christ have to be reconciled with sinners. Then, I shall answer a question regarding why sinners are not reconciled to God if He is so willing, and offer further application of this teaching.

The next point will serve as the application. Therefore, the ministers of God should also entreat and beseech you, using all means to draw your souls to be reconciled to God.

Chapter 61

The First Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Firstly, regarding God's willingness for reconciliation with sinners, God demonstrates this through His patience towards sinners. The Lord's long-suffering towards sinners manifests that He is willing to be reconciled. The scripture provides an argument from this, as seen in Romans 2:4, as if the Apostle is saying, "The patience of God holds this truth before you: that you should come in and repent, that you might obtain mercy from God. Otherwise, it leads you to repentance."

Unless God's patience indicated His willingness to be reconciled, it could not draw the heart to repentance. But His patience has great power in drawing the heart of man towards repentance because it shows His willingness to be reconciled with sinners.

If God were not willing to be reconciled with you, He would end you or, at the very least, would not exercise such patience as to lead you to repentance. As with the devils, as soon as they had sinned, He clapped chains upon them and reserved them in chains of darkness; there is no such patience of God towards them to act as an argument to draw them to repentance. Therefore, they cannot derive any encouraging conclusion from any act of God's patience to lead them back to Him. But all sinners who are the children of men can.

Has God spared your life at any particular time? Know that in that act, He manifests His willingness to be reconciled with your soul. If a man has an enemy at his advantage and chooses not to take it, does this not signify that he is willing to be at peace with him? And that is the first point.

Chapter 62.

The Second Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God and Christ to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Secondly, God has shown Himself to be very willing to be reconciled to sinners by making it the great masterpiece of all His works to provide a way for reconciliation with Him. The Lord has

worked so wonderfully for the children of men, more so than for the angels, by sending His Son and making Him a curse for our sins. In this, the Lord proclaims with a loud voice to the whole world: "O! Let it be known to all you sinners that I am willing to be reconciled to you."

We need not cite individual scriptures for this, for the entire doctrine of the Gospel is full of this truth. O! The heart of God is deeply engaged in this work of reconciliation. All the arguments in the world, and all possible expressions, could never convey this as much as the mere proclamation that God has sent His Son into the world to die for humanity's sin. This act declares, in the loudest possible way, that God is infinitely willing to be reconciled to sinners.

Chapter 63

The Third Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God and Christ to Be Reconciled to Sinners

And then thirdly, after God’s act of sending His Son, observe how He expresses Himself to the children of men! He professes that there is nothing in which He takes more glory than in showing mercy to sinners. He considers it His greatest glory in this world to show mercy to sinners.

Certainly, when sinners come to Him in repentance, He considers Himself most honoured. If a man had an enemy and expressed to his friends at his table, saying, "Such a one is my enemy, but O! How

gladly would I have him come to me, that there might be peace between us, and I would count it as the greatest honour I've ever had," would not everyone agree that this man is willing to be reconciled?

Surely, God does the same. In Exodus 34:6, the Lord, when proclaiming His glory as Moses desired, caused His glory to pass by him, saying, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." As if God were saying, "Moses, do you wish to see My glory? This is it – that I am merciful, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. Here is the height of My glory; this is where My magnificence is known."

Another remarkable passage is Isaiah 30:18: "Therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you." How is God exalted? By having mercy upon you! The Lord considers Himself exalted when He shows mercy to a sinner. Surely, He is very willing to be reconciled with sinners when He counts Himself exalted when they come to Him and believe in His Son. "Now am I exalted," says God, "this is what my soul glories in; this I consider to be my happiness." God is exalted in showing mercy, and this concludes this argument.

Chapter 64.

The Fourth Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God and Christ to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Fourthly, the Lord expresses His willingness to be reconciled to sinners with a sigh, a mark of earnest desire. You can see this in Deuteronomy 5:29, where God says, "O! That there were such a heart in them." When we express our desires, we might say, "I wish this were so." But when we express our most earnest desires, we add an "O!" – "O! That there were!"

Thus, God says, "O! That they had such a heart, that they would fear Me and walk in My ways." Why does God express this? It is so that it might be well with them and with their children forever: "O! That there were such a heart."

It is worth noting that if you look earlier in the chapter, the people had said that whatever God commanded, they would do. But the Lord saw that their hearts were not fully committed to Him. Therefore, the Lord (as it were) sighs with the earnestness of His desire: "O! That there were such a heart in them."

If a man who had fallen out with another, when in his bedchamber or at his table, sighed and said, "O! That this person would come to me and be reconciled, how glad I would be," how evident would it be that he earnestly desires reconciliation? This is precisely what God does; He sits (as it were) and says, "O! That there were such a heart."

Chapter 65.

The Fifth Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God and Christ to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Fifthly, the Lord does not only express His desire with a sigh but also with an oath. He takes a solemn oath to show how willing He is for sinners to come in and be reconciled to Him. It is the greatest oath that God has ever taken – about sinners coming in – to profess His willingness that sinners should not die but instead come and be reconciled to Him. You find this in Ezekiel 33:11: "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

As if a poor sinner were lying down, saying, "The Lord is provoked against me, and He will not be reconciled to me; no, the wrath of God is upon me, and He will take vengeance on me." The Lord looks upon a sinner lying in this state and bids His servants to go and say to him: The Lord swears by His own life, saying, "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner; I swear by Myself because I have no greater to swear by."

Chapter 66.

The Sixth Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God and Christ to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Another argument is this, in which God reveals in His word that above all works that are pleasing to Him, the work He most desires people to respect in this world is the act of believing in His Son and grasping the mercy He offers through Him. This is the work that pleases Him the most; and failing to do so is the greatest offence one

can commit against God. There is nothing else in this world that offends Him more. This demonstrates God's willingness to be reconciled to sinners, as He is pleased when a sinner comes to believe in His Son.

You find this in John 6:29: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent," said with emphasis above all other works. It is as if God were saying, "If you were to perform the most renowned work ever accomplished in this world, I would not delight in it. I would not care for that in comparison to the work of coming in and believing in My Son."

If there were a man who conquered the entire world, one who was renowned throughout all the earth, yet there were a humble soul with a repentant heart coming in and embracing God’s grace in Jesus Christ, casting itself upon His mercy for reconciliation – this humble soul (even if the lowest imaginable in the whole nation) would be a more glorious work in God's eyes than the greatest conquest of the mightiest ruler of the earth.

If you could control the sea, govern the entire world, or command the heavens, it would not be as glorious in God's eyes as coming and laying hold of His Son as He is offered in the Gospel. Even if you gave all your alms to the poor and surrendered your body to be burned, it would still be nothing compared to the work of believing in His Son.

In John 3, we see that God is most displeased when His Son is not believed. It is as if God were saying, "It's true, you are naturally my enemies, and you have lived in ways of hostility against Me. O! You have provoked Me all your days; in your youth, you were a drunken, unclean, profane person; a liar, a swearer, a Sabbath-breaker, and so forth. Yet now you live to hear the voice of the Gospel echoing in your ears, offering Jesus Christ to your souls for the pardon of your sins.

Let it be known to you that all the oaths you have sworn, all your blasphemies, your drunkenness, your uncleanness, and your Sabbath-breaking (if all combined), will not provoke Me as much as rejecting the grace I offer you in Jesus Christ. That is the condemnation of the world; all the other iniquities will not sink you as deeply into hell as refusing to believe in Jesus Christ and grasping the grace of God offered to you in the Gospel.

Now, is not God exceedingly willing to be reconciled when He reveals Himself in such a manner to sinful men?

Chapter 67.

The Seventh Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God and Christ to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Yet further, God manifests His willingness to be reconciled in this: that when He sees that (notwithstanding all these expressions that we have spoken of before), if sinners will not come in, God Himself will seek them, seeing they will not seek Him. God seeks sinners Himself.

Firstly, it is a point that you have heard before, that God is beforehand with us; God comes to us because we will not seek Him. If a man has fallen out with another, he should be the one to seek reconciliation, but he will not, because he has such a proud heart.

“Well,” says God, “that I may convince him that I am not such a harsh man as he believes me to be, I will seek him first. I will not

only seek him, but I will go to him and beseech him." This is what you find in the text: Christ is said to have come to save and to seek that which was lost. We were all lost and would not seek Him, so He was obliged to come. Indeed, He came from the bosom of His Father. He entered the world, and His great mission was to seek those who were lost, and when He found them, He beseeched them to be reconciled unto Him.

Chapter 68.

The Eighth Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Furthermore, God manifests His willingness to be reconciled in the ways He deals with wretched, sinful men, by sending His grace to allure the hearts of sinners. The Lord sends His mercy to display all its beauty and splendour before the sons of men—all its excellence and glory—so that it might entice the sinner's soul to come to Him. He doesn't merely seek out sinners; He strives to win them over with love and mercy. This is God's way: to present His mercy before the soul, to display its beauty and excellence, to draw, entice, and allure the hearts of men. Thus, God, as it were, uses cords of love to draw the hearts of poor, sinful men to Himself.

If God were to frighten men into coming to Him, that would be one thing. But it is this that we have cause to bless God for: if the Lord approached in a terrifying manner, compelling us to come to Him so that peace might be made between God and us—though He may

sometimes use terror and wrath to stop men in their sinful ways and force them to turn—He also approaches with His mercy. He sets His mercy before the soul and displays its beauty, excellence, and glory before the sinner's heart, that it might allure them to come in.

God speaks of His people in Hosea 2:14: there was a great breach between Israel and God at that time, and when God would be reconciled to Israel, He expressed it this way: “Therefore, behold, I will allure her.” And in Hosea 11:4, He says, “I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.” God dealt with them in a way that was suitable, understanding that human nature prefers to be drawn rather than driven, and cannot bear to be forced as much as it is willing to be led by love. Therefore, says God, “I will deal with them according to their nature, in a way that is suitable. I draw them with cords of a man and with bonds of love.” Here we see the gracious expressions of God towards wretched sinners, to soften their hearts that they may come in and be reconciled to Him. God removes the terror of His greatness and approaches with loving and tender ways to draw the hearts of sinners.

I appeal to your consciences—have you, who know what it is to be reconciled to God, not seen the Lord presenting the riches of His grace before your souls? Have you not witnessed the alluring attributes of God, displayed before you to win your hearts to Himself?

Chapter 69.

The Ninth Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Another is this: that the Lord is willing to yield to His creatures, as far as may be, to yield to the creature (I say) as far as He can with honour. Such is the way of the Gospel in bringing sinners to God that God has yielded to His creature as far as can be conceived, in a manner that honours Him. He cannot deny Himself or His glory, but take it thus far: God must have His glory. It is impossible for God to yield further to the creature than He has already done.

Whereas God might have required satisfaction in our own persons, He has yielded to this: "I will take it in another." This is the condition of the Covenant of Grace, which differs from the Covenant of Works. The Covenant of Works required perfect obedience in our own persons, so that if we failed to obey, it demanded satisfaction from us. Now, in the Covenant of Grace, there is a higher consideration, as it were. God is content to accept a surety on our behalf. He will be satisfied, for our part, if there is uprightness—if there are only endeavours, if there is simply willingness of heart. Though He sees that we provoke Him day by day, God says, "Whereas I insisted upon perfect obedience in the Covenant of Works, now I will be satisfied with the will for the deed." If there is uprightness of heart, though there may be many weaknesses, He is willing and content with that.

Now, does not a man show himself willing to be reconciled to another when he says, "Well, let there be any terms proposed that can be, I will yield to any terms as far as I can with honour. I must not dishonour myself, but as far as possible, I yield"? God has done

this. He professes to the world that, as far as He can, He has yielded to us. Now, if we do not accept the terms He requires (for they are such reasonable and fair terms that no lesser terms could be imagined), there could not be less required of the creature than is required by the Creator.

Objection: You say that believing is a great matter.

But consider it in itself—it is not such a great matter except in relation to Christ. In its own nature, it is like a poor beggar who puts forth his hand to take alms, and it is God who gives it to us, too. Now, if we do anything, what can we do that is less than receiving, especially when we have been given a hand by God with which to receive?

Imagine a beggar promised alms if he would come and take it. "Oh," says the beggar, "I am lame, I cannot go, and my hand is withered; I cannot stretch it forth." Then the giver of alms says, he will help the beggar there; he will provide legs to walk and heal his hand, giving it strength to reach out and receive the alms. All the beggar needs to do is not struggle against him, not resist. "I will be with you," he says. "You shall lean upon me; I will provide you with crutches." Is there not as much consideration as could be imagined here?

And so it is in the work of reconciliation of sinners unto God: He gives the alms, and He gives the hand with which to receive it.

Chapter 70.

The Tenth Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God and Christ to Be Reconciled to Sinners

And then, the Lord manifests His willingness to be reconciled unto sinners in this: He does profess unto sinners that the greatest sins they have ever committed shall not be a hindrance to this work of reconciliation. The Lord, I say, professes this to sinners. He sends His messengers to tell them that though (perhaps) they may be conscious of some vile act they have committed, whereby they may think that God will never pass by that sin, God, to take away such an objection, makes it as clear as anything in this world that not even the greatest sin ever committed (except that one against the Holy Spirit) shall bar or hinder the work of their reconciliation.

Certainly, where that sin is committed, the heart will never desire to come to be reconciled to God but instead will fly in the face of God to exact revenge. However, if you have a heart that desires to come to God, that is an infallible argument that you have not committed that sin. I could cite many Scriptures for this to show that God professes that no sin shall be a barrier between Him and you. In Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord..." Yes, come now, let us reason together.

Thus, God deals in a familiar way with sinners. Imagine a criminal before a prince, shaking, quivering, and trembling, fearing that the prince will take his life, conscious of the abundance of evil he has been guilty of. If the prince were to take him by the hand and say, "Come, let us rise up, let us reason together; though your offences be great, they shall not be a barrier between you and me," this is what we have the authority to proclaim in the name of the Lord God of Heaven to every soul, even to the worst and greatest of sinners here now before the Lord.

We say this in His name: there is nothing past between God and you, no sin yet committed that shall be your undoing or eternal destruction. Rather, it will be some sin yet to come that will be the eternal destruction of every sinner in this congregation. It is true that if God were to smite you now, it would be for the sins of the past. But if God lets you live this day, it is more likely for something that is yet to come, rather than for anything that is past—for the continuance in the hardness of your heart and your unbelief from this time forward.

If one had fallen into arrears and incurred great punishment, enough for their undoing, and it were said to them, "Thus far you have gone, but here is a proclamation: there is nothing from the past that shall be charged against you. But look to the future." I do not say that all past sins will never be reckoned with, but that He will never hold past sins against you without reason. Yet, some future evil may cause God to bring past sins into account once more. That which will be your undoing and destruction will be something to come. If you continue in your wicked ways, that will bring all your past sins upon you again.

But now, if you had a heart this day, at this present moment, to fall down before the Lord, to seek to make peace with Him, and to embrace the grace of God in His Son, I can boldly pronounce that all your past sins are done away with. O, remember this gracious offer of God in Isaiah 1:18: whatever you have been before need not discourage you now; it is the continuance in your iniquity that will be your undoing.

Will not this cause your soul to justify God on the great day? Must not God be justified if any sinner in this congregation be awakened at last? This argument shall rise up against them and shall justify God against them. God will say, "You who lived a long time in sin, you

heard that after many years of sinning, whatever your past sins were, some things that were yet to come would be your destruction, or else you would never be destroyed. Yet you dared to continue for the time to come; you boldly added to that heap of sins you had built over a long time, thus bringing all your past sins upon yourself." Therefore, righteous is God in the condemnation of this sinner.

We speak of God's willingness to be reconciled to sinners, to encourage you to come in and be reconciled, or otherwise that the justice of God may be clear on the great day. This is a special purpose of all the manifestations of God's goodness to sinners—that He might clear Himself on that great day for those who shall perish.

There are many things yet to discuss regarding God's willingness to be reconciled to sinners. I know there are objections in your minds, such as, "How can we come?" and "If God is so willing, might He not bring our hearts to be willing to be reconciled to Him?" We shall explore these more fully later. For the present, I want to present to you this: the manifestation of God's goodness toward sinners, to gain their hearts so they might be reconciled to Him.

I would be very sorry to open all these things in such a congregation as this if it were not to gain some souls. For it is likely that some will be hardened, and if some should be hardened, while others remain ungained, what a miserable thing it would be. I might make this an evidence of how willing God is to be reconciled to sinners: that He would have the riches of His grace manifested to gain sinners to Himself, even though He knows it will serve to harden others. He knows it will result in the eternal damnation of many souls, yet for all this, says God, "Let My willingness to be reconciled be opened to poor sinners by the preaching of the Gospel, even though it costs many souls dearly."

For the love He bears to poor souls, let this be made known to all. Now, if God were not strongly inclined to do good to souls, surely He would not risk the damnation of other souls in this way. But God says, "Let their souls go, rather than My willingness to be reconciled to others should not be declared unto them."

Chapter 71.

The Eleventh Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God and Christ to Be Reconciled to Sinners

The next argument that shows the willingness of God to be reconciled unto sinners is this: the Lord, in His word, uses very powerful and strong arguments to draw the heart to come in to be reconciled. This is evidence, I say, that the Lord is willing, as demonstrated by the strong reasons that God employs in His word to gain the hearts of sinners and bring them to reconciliation. He does not merely offer mercy or simply set His mercy before the soul. Instead, the Lord labours with strong reasons, motives, and arguments to persuade and gain the hearts of sinners unto Himself, to come and be reconciled to Him.

Now, when a man offers peace, that is significant, and when he does it in a generous, loving way, it is even more so. But when he sends strong arguments to persuade and is not easily deterred, considering beforehand what might be most likely to persuade the heart of that person, saying, "What can I think that will gain his heart the most? That I will certainly use to persuade him," undoubtedly, this is how

God acts. God looks upon the children of men and considers which arguments will most affect their hearts.

The Scripture is exceedingly full of prevalent and powerful arguments to persuade the hearts of men to come in and be reconciled unto God. These arguments are sometimes taken from the equity of God's ways towards them and their unequal ways towards Him: "Are not my ways equal?" saith God, "and your ways unequal? Is there anything I require of you but righteousness? Do not I speak righteously?"

At other times, He uses arguments from the absolute necessity that lies upon sinners to come and be reconciled to God, showing them that they will certainly be lost, undone, and eternally damned if they do not come in: "He that believeth not, the wrath of God abides upon him." You are lost and undone creatures unless you come in.

Sometimes, the arguments are taken from the excellency of the benefit and profit that there is in coming to God and being reconciled to Him. All the glorious promises of the Gospel serve as powerful arguments to draw sinners to run to be reconciled unto God. I could elaborate greatly on this, showing the particular arguments that God uses, but let us take one full argument that we have to persuade sinners to come in, found in Proverbs 1:23: "Turn you at my reproof; behold, I will pour my spirit upon you; I will make known my words unto you."

He speaks here to simple ones, scorners, and fools: "Turn you at my reproof; behold, I will pour my spirit out upon you," saith God. As if God should say, "Though you are scorners, the truth is, my heart works towards you, my heart yearns for you, and if you would but turn to me, I would pour forth my heart to you. You shall have my very spirit, my very heart let out unto you if you will turn unto me."

What an argument is here to prevail with the hardest hearts in the world! For God Himself to come and say unto a sinner, to one who has scorned Him and His ways, and to a fool who has gone on in ways of folly and wickedness, "Oh, wretched sinner! Come in, come in, turn to me, turn to me, for my heart is full, my heart is overflowing. Turn to me; I will pour forth my heart to thee."

All those promises of giving rest to your soul, of granting eternal life, eternal salvation, glory, peace, comfort, and a kingdom, shall all be made good to you. The Lord, therefore, suits Himself to us with such arguments, so closely as to outbid other comforts that we have in the world in any ways of sin. Hence, He speaks of honey, milk, raiment, gold, silver, and all such things as are precious in the eyes of men, such things as are esteemed by us, and He offers His Son to us with such notions that each of them might serve as a compelling argument to gain the hearts of sinners to come unto God.

This is the way of God: He comes to the hearts of His people with the most persuasive arguments, such reasons as one might think impossible to refute. I appeal to the hearts of those who have experienced the work of God upon them. How did God come to your hearts? Did He not come with mighty, strong arguments to you?

The Devil tempts with strong arguments, and God, too, tempts with strong arguments. The Devil draws, and God draws, but God's mercies draw stronger than the Devil can. Oh, it was mercy that won that soul! And, indeed, when the Lord pleases to work effectively upon the soul, He can present stronger arguments to draw the heart of a sinner to Him than it is possible for the Devil to prevail against.

Chapter 72.

The Twelfth Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God and Christ to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Another way is this: in answering all objections that lie in the hearts of sinners. Whatever objections lie in the hearts of sinners, God has ways to answer all of them, and He does so through His word and by His Spirit. Now, what would a sinner object? If you object to your unworthiness of such mercies as God offers to you, and therefore think it unlikely that God will ever bestow that mercy upon you, observe Isaiah 55. There is a place that God intends directly to answer that objection so that it may never hinder any sinner from coming unto Him. God says, "Come to the waters, and he that has no money, come, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Note that in one verse, "Come without money" is mentioned three times: "he that has no money, come and eat"; then, "buy without money"; and finally, "without price." What is the meaning of this? Here you should understand that the promises of the Gospel are represented by wine, milk, and bread—things most delightful and useful for human nature. The Gospel is represented in Scripture by things that are most excellent of all. Sometimes it is described as a kingdom, as when "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" serves as an argument. At other times, it is described as a marriage, where God sends people to be reconciled, using the argument that it is to marry them to His Son. Sometimes it is described as a supper, to which God the Father invites us—a supper wherein there are all kinds of delicacies, as the great King prepares a feast at the marriage of His Son. These are the powerful arguments that God uses.

"Oh, but I am unworthy," says a poor soul. "What? That someone like me, so vile, so wretched, and utterly unworthy, should receive such things?" This was the Devil's tactic from the beginning. The Devil labours to make sinners disregard the Gospel, to set God's counsels at nought, as you see in Proverbs 1, to consider the blood of the Covenant a common thing—that is the first way. But if he cannot prevail in that way, and the Lord shines through all mist and misconceptions about the Gospel, showing the soul the excellence and beauty of His Son and the glorious things of the Gospel, then the Devil tries another way. He says, "Indeed, there are glorious things, but you are unworthy. You are a wretched, base, vile creature. How can you think that God would grant such things to you?" Now, the Lord answers this objection. What does God say? "Come without money." What does that mean? It means that, though you have no worthiness in yourself, though you lack the ability to buy anything good, yet come, come and embrace My grace. That shall make you rich enough; you shall have all you need that way. "Come without money and without price." Let that objection never hinder you—that you are unworthy or unable to do anything. The Lord calls you without money and offers freely to you. Therefore, in the latter part of the Book of Revelation, in the last chapter, verse 17, it is said, "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let him that hears say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come; and whoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

"How shall I ever think to have it?" It is free, so this objection cannot hinder.

Objection: "Oh! But there may be another objection. Perhaps the Lord will require something from me—not before granting His mercy freely, but after I have come. Then perhaps things that are hard will be required of me. Oh! The ways of God are difficult, and then I must

live so strictly, I must be conscientious in all my ways, abandon all my sins and lusts. And what," says the Devil to a corrupt heart, "will you leave all such pleasant ways and be so strictly bound? Then you must do nothing but what aligns with the word of God and your conscience. Farewell to all the comforts and joys of your life if you become religious and godly."

These are the temptations that keep the hearts of men away. I appeal to you: have not some of your hearts been kept away from Jesus Christ and the ways of God merely because of such temptations as these? And indeed, it may be so at first until the nature of man is changed.

But mark how this objection is addressed when sinners are called to Christ. (I suppose you know the passage): "Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

But that relates to the former point, and then, afterwards, when Christ had said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you, and my burden," etc. It seems, then, that we must be yoked and burdened. But notice what follows in verse 30: "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (As if Christ should say) never listen to such a temptation about difficulties in my ways. I assure you beforehand, you will find that the Devil merely tricks, deceives, and misleads you. I can assure you that I will place no yoke upon you that, when you come to bear it, you will not say, "It is an easy yoke," and although it is a burden, you shall acknowledge that it is a light burden.

This, I dare say, in the name of God to all: come in, all you who stand off from the ways of God. Though God's ways may seem hard to you at first, yet I dare declare from God unto you, that you will find God's ways easier at last than you ever did in the ways of sin. For certainly,

there is more trouble in the ways of sin than there can be in the ways of God. And when God calls upon you to come in and be reconciled, He professes this to you: He will require nothing of you but that which shall be more pleasant than any ways of sin in which you lived before. There will be more comforts and joy, and that in the present, than you ever had in the ways of sin. Just ask anyone who has tried this, and invite them to speak their conscience to you (I mean those who have had any sense of Christ's love towards them). Yes, if you have begun to walk in wisdom's ways, which are pleasant, and to tread in those paths that are strewn with roses and paved with peace, then speak plainly: how do you find yourself? Is it not better now than it was before? Do you not find more ease, more comfort, and joy in God's ways than you did before in any way of sin?

Oh, such a person will confess to you that they find more comfort than ever before; they find more sweetness in communion with God in His ways in one day than they found in the ways of sin throughout their entire life. The Holy Spirit, in pleading with the hearts of men, says the same in Proverbs 3:17: "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." If you believe the Spirit of God, the ways of godliness are indeed ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are paths of peace.

What, then, should hinder you? Neither your unworthiness nor the hardship of the way can be a hindrance. These are the two great obstacles that lie in the way, and God fully removes them in Scripture. And if there be any other objection, I dare undertake—present whatever objections you can (give me but a little time)—to find some clear word in Scripture that will address that very objection.

Now, how does this show God's exceeding willingness to be reconciled to sinners? If a man sends his messenger to offer peace to another, and he thinks beforehand, "Oh, but he will have this and that objection against me," and yet he says to his servant, who is tasked with this mission, "You shall answer this objection in this manner, and that objection in that manner."

Chapter 73.

The Thirteenth Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Another evidence of God's willingness to be reconciled is this: that God is so importunate with sinners. He uses such strong arguments that he first removes objections, and then he is so insistent. He does not merely satisfy himself by offering mercy but is very importunate in the task. The importunity of God appears, first, in this: that the Scripture expresses God crying out after sinners; not only seeking out sinners but calling and crying out to them. So, the words in the original are of God's beseeching sinners to be reconciled and of God calling to sinners. In Proverbs 1, it is said of wisdom that it cries; the Lord cries out, and that in Isaiah 55.

When he makes a proclamation, he begins first with, "Oh, yes! Oh, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money," and there is the offer of Christ with a proclamation.

Further, God's importunity is manifest in this: that he repeats himself and is not content with expressing himself just once. Instead, he does it again, and again, and again. He is persistent, as in Isaiah 55, verse 1. See how many times there is crying out in one verse: "Ho! Everyone that thirsts, come ye; and he that has no money, come; and come," the third time—three times in one verse, God says, "Come" to sinners. And then in the third verse: "Incline your ear, and come unto me," says God, "and hear, and your souls shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you." There is another promise: "Even the sure mercies of David." So here, in one short Scripture, God says "Come" four times. Oh, how importunate is God with sinners!

God does not deal with us as we commonly deal with him. God seeks after sinners more earnestly than sinners seek after God. Consider how we seek God for mercy; we pray to God for mercy, but we are often content with praying once and seldom follow up on our prayers to see what becomes of them. But God, he cries to us to come, and if we do not come the first time, then he cries, "Come, come, and come," four times together. We are often inclined to think that if our petitions are repeated twice in prayer, it is mere tautology, but this shows the earnestness of the Spirit of God in it, and he is exceedingly willing.

Chapter 74.

The Fourteenth Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Another evidence is this: when yet sinners do not come, still the Lord does not abandon them but appeals to the very consciences of sinners and deals with them that way; and that is very powerful. He deals with sinners in this manner to break their hearts. When, after all his arguments, they still do not come in, then the Lord appeals to their own consciences and pleads with them by appealing to their sense of right and wrong, asking why they should not come in and yield to him. This approach is very powerful in prevailing with sinners.

If you wish to prevail with anyone over a matter you desire to accomplish, what course do you take? Either you send for them or go to them and present the case to them, but they remain unmoved. Then you bring powerful arguments to persuade them, yet they still do not move. Next, you take away all their objections, but still, this does not prevail. Then you importune them, and if that does not overcome them, what is the next step? You appeal to their own conscience, saying, “I appeal to your own conscience, whether I have not spoken justly. I leave it to your conscience, and let it judge in the presence of God.” Often, this prevails more than all the arguments in the world. When you appeal to a man's own conscience, that he is dealing unfairly by not yielding, this approach frequently succeeds.

God does the same. He appeals to men's consciences. I will give you some Scripture for it. In Isaiah 43:26, "Put me in remembrance; let us plead together; declare thou, that thou mayest be justified." "Come," says God, "let us hear what you can say; let us plead together. Declare it, say what you can, and see whether you or I are in the right. I will even be content to leave it to you (only let us plead and declare what we can)."

But that place seems even more complete than what you have in Jeremiah 2:3, where you find repeated expressions of God pleading with his people. In verse 9, and again at least three times in this chapter, the Lord says he will plead. In verse 23, he states, "Wherefore will you plead with me?" and then in verse 35, "Behold, I will plead with thee," says God. But now, God pleads by appealing to the very consciences of men. You find this in Ezekiel 18:25: "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not equal.' Hear now, O house of Israel," (as if he would say), "Conscience, answer: Is not my way equal? Will not your own consciences answer you that his ways are equal?"

The Lord is content to plead with his people, and the conclusion of his pleading is to leave it to their consciences, as if God would say this (as he often does): God comes by his Spirit in the ministry of his Word. I appeal to you—has he not often done so?—and says, "Do you think, in your very consciences, that these ways in which you walk are right? And are my ways good? Is it fair that wretched, sinful creatures should take their liberty to continue in their ways all their days, indulging in the lusts of their own vain hearts, and now, when they can sin no more nor any longer, they should cry to God for mercy, and that he should pardon them and accept them into his favour? Is this fair? Is not the Lord infinitely more deserving of all the strength you have, even if it were ten thousand times more than it is, than you giving it up to your lusts and vanities? Conscience, speak: is not God most worthy of all? And what were you made for? Was it merely to eat and drink and satisfy your flesh, indulging in your lusts here for a while? Do you think in your conscience that God intended no other purpose for you when he sent you into the world?"

You have been on your sickbeds and cried to God, promising him better obedience. Now, are your ways equal, to take your liberty to sin after God has delivered you, after he preserved your life when you

were at the brink of death, and when death was ready to hand you over to eternal misery? Do you think that this was God's intention in preserving your life, so you might have more time to sin against him, and spend the latter part of your strength dishonouring his Name? Was this God's purpose in preserving your life? God might have struck you one blow more and sent you down to eternal misery. Then, God would have had no more dishonour from you but instead would have had the glory of his justice upon you. Now, do you think that this was the reason God preserved you—to grant you more years, to allow you more time to sin against him?

This demonstrates God's willingness to be reconciled, that the Lord is thus pleading with you. And let me speak to everyone here who has felt God pleading in this way with them: know that the Lord, by this act, strives to bring you to be reconciled to him. This is nothing other than the striving of the Spirit of God himself with you, though perhaps you find this troublesome. Many men and women, when their consciences plead with them in this way, find it bothersome. Oh, wretched man or woman, this work of conscience is nothing but God pleading with you to save your soul. You have resisted his Word preached to you, and now God reaches out to you in another way—by his Spirit striving in your conscience. He appeals to your own conscience so that you might be brought in and reconciled to him.

But when God has no mind to be reconciled, he says to Conscience, "Let him alone," and then the sinner continues with a hardened heart, feeling relieved that his conscience is quiet. Oh, no, no, Conscience is quiet because God has stopped striving with you.

Chapter 75.

The Fifteenth Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God to Be Reconciled to Sinners

But further, the Lord shows his willingness to be reconciled to sinners in this: that when one way will not prevail, and you might think there is no other way to be found, yet there is another. When God deals in a familiar way, as man to man, when he has presented his arguments, answered objections, been importunate, and pleaded, then, sometimes (if it is a tender-hearted person), his heart might even break within him, and he is ready to burst into tears because of the stubbornness and wilfulness of such a one who is set on ruining himself and standing out against so much reason. This tends to prevail more than all other arguments, especially when he is speaking to someone he has a relationship with, such as a father to a child.

The father may persuade the child, answer what the child has to say, be importunate, and appeal to the conscience of the child, yet the child remains stubborn. Eventually, the father or mother can no longer hold back and bursts into tears, lamenting the hardness of heart in such a one. Now, if a stubborn child were to look in through a keyhole and see his father or mother shedding tears because of his hardness of heart, that child would surely be convinced of this: "Now certainly, my father loves me, and all he does is for my good."

Certainly, this is what Christ did when he came to Jerusalem; he wept over it. On what grounds? "Oh, that thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things that concern thy peace! Oh, that thou hadst known!" And Christ began to weep.

We must understand that Christ's tears at that time concern sinners now, as truly and verily as they concerned sinners at that very moment. We are to view Christ's behaviour towards sinners in former times as still relevant to us today, among us and concerning us.

Now, I would appeal to you: suppose Christ were born into this world in the flesh once more, as he was before, and he came and looked towards this commonwealth. Suppose he came here and said, "Oh, England, England, oh, that thou hadst known the things that concern thy peace," and he wept over London or wept over Westminster, just as he wept over that city of Jerusalem. Would this not break our hearts? Would we not take this as a great argument that Christ was truly desirous of the peace of this city or place?

Now, concerning every particular soul, this is true. Everyone should apply that Scripture to themselves, as if Christ stood weeping over them and saying, "Oh, that thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things that concern thy peace." Would this not break your hearts —this town to which Christ sends his Gospel? Suppose you could see him bodily, standing here, with one tear trickling down after another, saying, "Oh, that this people knew the things that concern their peace, at least in this their day when they have an opportunity in their hands, before the Gospel sun goes down or is eclipsed!" Surely, we would say that Christ's tears demonstrate the deep compassion of his heart towards them, as if their time might not continue long. "Oh, that they knew it now!"

If you saw Christ thus weeping, I believe this would be a powerful argument to you that Christ is willing to be reconciled to you. We are, I say, to consider that Scripture as if it were happening now. And though Christ does not shed tears now in heaven, there is as much

compassion in the heart of Christ now as there ever was when he was here on earth. He has lost no compassion by ascending to heaven. Therefore, know that Jesus Christ looks, even this day, upon this congregation, and at many particular souls. It is probable that Christ more specially focuses on some and says in his very heart, "Oh, that such a soul, such a servant, such a youth, oh, that they only knew the things that concern their peace! For now, the Gospel is opened to them, and a day of salvation is made known to them, and efforts are being made to draw them away from their evil ways to embrace me. Oh, that they knew these things that concern their peace!"

And thus, it appears how willing God is to be reconciled.

I shall later show more about Christ in a more special manner, that sinners might come and be reconciled unto God.

Chapter 76.

The Sixteenth Argument: Manifesting the Exceeding Willingness of God to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Further, there is another evidence of the willingness of God to be reconciled to sinners, and that is this: the Lord foresees that, after he has done all to be reconciled to sinners, let him do what he can, he sees how little honour he shall receive (at least for the present, in this world) from them. He knows that even after they are brought in, there will still be an abundance of corruption, and they will dishonour God greatly and grieve the Holy Spirit who draws them.

He sees that they will walk more offensively, and perhaps even scandalously, towards their brethren, and dishonour the profession of religion.

God foresees the trouble and effort he will have with those whom he brings to himself, and yet, despite all this, he continues with his work and labours with the hearts of sinners. Notwithstanding all that he foresees, he perseveres.

Then, lastly, after the Lord has used all these means to bring sinners in, and has worked to break their hearts that they might be reconciled to him—even though they stand out against him, plead, weep, and mourn—yet the Lord is content to wait, and to wait for a long time upon sinners, not taking advantage of their rejection of his grace that he offers to them.

That scripture I mentioned before is sufficient for this, in Isaiah 30:18: "And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious." Oh! How many years has the Lord waited upon some of you? We have cause to stand in awe and admire the grace of God—that he would offer mercy to us even once, and that after so many offers and such earnest attempts to prevail upon our hearts, despite our obstinate rejection of his grace, God would still wait upon us to heal our souls and finally overcome us.

Oh! This truly manifests the goodness of God and the tenderness of his heart in his willingness to be reconciled to sinners. Therefore, in Jeremiah 13, note what God says to sinners in the last verse: "I have seen thy adulteries, and thy neighings, and the lewdness of thy whoredoms, and thine abominations. Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! Wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be?" Saith God. Oh! That it might be just once; I am content to wait again and again. Oh! When shall it once be? Let not all my labour be in vain.

Oh! Here is the fullness of the expressions of God, and that place likewise in Isaiah 57 is noteworthy for this purpose, particularly verses 17 and 18: "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him; I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him," etc. Though he went on, and I was wroth, yet (saith God) "I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will not take advantage. I will be content, despite all their stubborn rejections of all the offers of grace, yet I will heal them for all that."

This frowardness refers not only to being unprofitable under afflictions, but also to when one is treated kindly and does not respond accordingly, insisting on having their own will—such a one goes on frowardly.

Now then, if we could combine all these things that have been mentioned regarding God's willingness towards sinners, to bring them in and be reconciled to him, oh Lord! How infinite would the grace and goodness of God appear? How greatly would God be glorified in his grace?

I see I cannot possibly address all these matters I previously intended to discuss, such as why all this is necessary and the reasons why God deals with us in this way.

A word or two at this time on why God does all this—why does God deal with sinners in such a manner?

Firstly, it is because mercy pleases Him. In Micah 7:18, God makes a large promise of pardon for sin, because mercy pleases Him. Now, whatever pleases a creature is something that the creature loves to do, and loves to do to the fullest, just as all forms of pleasure—eating, drinking, and recreation—are very pleasing to a voluptuous man,

who therefore desires to have them to the full. A large bag of gold pleases a covetous man, and he is never satisfied but would have it to the full. Honour pleases an ambitious man, and he never has enough. In the same way, mercy pleases God, and therefore (if I may speak with holy reverence) God almost thinks He has never done enough to show the riches of His grace.

Secondly, God does this because the blood of His Son cries continually in His ears for mercy. It is of such infinite worth and value, and the obedience of His Son in shedding His blood has been so acceptable to God and still is, that whenever this blood is pleaded for, the Lord must grant mercy to the utmost. It is the blood of Jesus Christ, shed for sinners, that pleads with God the Father that all this mercy might be shown.

It is said in Scripture that the blood of Christ speaks better things than the blood of Abel. The blood of Abel cries loudly for vengeance —"Vengeance, Lord, against sinners!" But the blood of Christ cries loudly, "Mercy, mercy, Lord, for sinners!" And God hears the cry of His Son's blood. "What is this that cries out?" The blood of His Son for mercy for sinners: "Let them have mercy, yes, let them have mercy to the fullest." Then the floodgates of mercy open. If it were not for the blood of Christ, the patience of God might let out some common favours, but when God comes to satisfy the cries of the blood of Christ for mercy, He says, "Open all the floodgates now, and let in streams of mercy for sinners; let mercy be shown to the highest degree that can be." If the blood of His Son cries for it, it must be—though it requires wonderful mercy—it must be great, rich, and glorious mercy. It is not just a drop, but an ocean of mercy needed to answer it.

"But," says God, "the blood of my Son cries for mercy, and even though there is a need for an infinite ocean of mercy to cleanse the soul of such a sinner, it must be granted, because the blood of my Son cries for it." When you find God manifesting Himself to your souls in ways of mercy, it springs from the blood of Jesus Christ that cries out to God the Father for mercy to be bestowed upon you. This is the sum and substance of all these expressions of God's grace towards sinners.

We may think it strange that such an infinite God should condescend to sinners, but when we come to examine the reason, we need not wonder at it. We see now where it all comes from; it all springs from the ever-living fountain of the unsearchable rich grace of God in Christ. Though, at first reading, we may wonder that God would do so, and perhaps some may think these are just the exaggerations of ministers, when we come to understand the foundation, the ground of it all, we must acknowledge the reality of it: it is no wonder that God shows mercy to such unworthy and vile souls. Why? Because the blood of His Son cries for mercy.

Chapter 77

Christ's Willingness to be Reconciled to Sinners, Further Opened

Now, before we come to answer the objections or make any application, there is still more to be revealed to you: "[As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead]." As much as the heart of God is set on being reconciled with sinners, so is Jesus

Christ's heart. It is true, Christ is God, but here, Christ and God are spoken of separately. Christ is the same God as the Father, but He is both God and man—God incarnate, the Mediator between the Father and us. Therefore, it is exceedingly useful to show how the heart of Christ is set on the reconciliation of sinners to God, for the Apostle comes in the name of Christ as well as God the Father.

Now that the heart of Christ is involved, this is evident in understanding the great work of reconciliation that He has undertaken so willingly. Certainly, if Christ had not been deeply committed to this work of bringing sinners to be reconciled to the Father, He would never have undertaken such a task, knowing it would be so difficult and what it would cost Him. Yet, He took it willingly and joyfully. For comparison, consider these two Scriptures: the first is Psalm 40:7, "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me." It begins in verse 6, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering thou didst not require. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O God." This Psalm is a prophecy of Christ, and it clearly refers to Him when compared with Hebrews 10, where the Apostle quotes this very text, albeit with slight variation.

There are three or four points here to observe about Christ's willingness to come and undertake the great work of making atonement between God and sinners: "Mine ears hast thou opened" is the first; "Lo, I come" is the second; then, "I delight to do thy will," and lastly, "Thy law is within my heart." These four points are crucial.

First: "Lo, I come," says Christ, to undertake this task. It is evident that there was a covenant between the Father and the Son from all

eternity, that Christ should, in due time, come into the world and take on human nature. Now the time had arrived for Christ to come. Many people may agree to do something in advance, but when it comes time to fulfil it—especially if it involves difficulty or hardship —they may hesitate. But Christ, having agreed with His Father from all eternity that at the appointed time He would come into the world, take on human nature, be in the form of a servant, and be made a curse for man's sins to reconcile sinners to Himself, did not hesitate. When the time arrived for Him to undertake this great work, observe how Christ's heart was in it. He did not hang back or regret the covenant; instead, He said, "I come, I come," as we say when called to do something we love. Now the time had come for Him to take on human nature, to be made in the form of a servant, to bear God's wrath, and to satisfy His justice for man's sin. "I come, I come," says Christ.

Second: He did not just come, but He came with delight: "I delight to do thy will." What was this will? It was that Christ should be humbled to the death of the cross. Even though He knew it would cost Him His life, He delighted in doing it because His heart was so set on reconciling sinners to the Father.

Third: "Thy law is in my heart," meaning that the law of God had made a deep impression on His heart, binding Him to fulfil what He had undertaken. It was not a superficial commitment but something embedded within the very core of His being.

Fourth: "Mine ears hast thou opened." The words are better understood as, "Mine ears hast thou bored." This phrase refers to the practice under the Law, where if a servant chose not to leave his master in the year of Jubilee, his ear would be pierced with an awl, signifying his lifelong service. Similarly, Christ is saying, "I am

content to be a servant whose ear is bored," willing to listen and obey every command of His Master. His Master's commandments were not burdensome; they were His very meat and drink to fulfil His Lord's will.

Well might the Apostle say, "As in Christ's stead we beseech you," as if he were saying, "Christ's heart is so deeply set on bringing sinners to be reconciled to God, and we, in His name, come to prevail upon sinners, to bring them unto God."

Secondly, observe what was the first sermon that Christ ever preached: "For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." That was His first sermon, calling sinners to repent, because the kingdom of grace, wherein the Gospel of God should reign, was at hand, said Christ. Then, Christ would preach in such a way as to gain the most, especially when He had the largest audiences. What was it that He preached when He was among the Jews at the Feast of Dedication? On the great day of the Feast (as the Scripture says), Christ lifted up His voice and cried, "Ho, everyone that thirsts!"

A minister, when preaching to a great congregation and unlikely to speak to them again, should choose a subject that is most dear to his heart. Now, Christ, at the Feast of Dedication, knowing He would not return to them soon, spoke with urgency: "Ho, everyone that thirsts, come!" Moreover, Christ professed that the very reason He came into the world was "to save and to seek that which was lost," not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. This was the great purpose for which He came into the world; it was the main subject of His preaching, the great mission He was sent to fulfil.

Further observe with what lovingness, gentleness, and sweetness He did it. What a gracious invitation we find in Matthew 11: "Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

He professes in John 6:37, "None that comes to me will I cast off; I will not cast off any who come to me." Yea, He tells us that He will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed. To encourage sinners, He assures them that if there are any stirrings of the heart towards Him, even as faint as smoking flax or as weak as a bruised reed, He will not extinguish or break them. Instead, He will encourage even the smallest beginnings in sinners coming to Him. These are the expressions of Christ towards sinners, showing how tenderly He cares for them.

When the time drew near for Christ to suffer, then (if ever) one might think that if Christ's heart were not wholly invested, He would draw back—not only when He was to come into the world but especially in His role as Mediator, when He was to endure the violence of His Father's wrath poured out upon Him. But observe how He expresses Himself in Luke 22:15: "And He said unto them, 'With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.'" Why did Christ desire it so strongly? He knew that as soon as He had eaten it, He would be called to suffer for man's sin and accomplish the great work of redemption for sinful men. That was when it would be done.

Why, then, did Christ desire this Passover so intensely? One might have thought that above all Passovers, this would be the one Christ would fear, for this Passover would signal the end of His life. Christ Himself was to become the Passover, to suffer and be the paschal lamb. Yet He desired, above all, to eat this Passover, showing how committed He was to complete the work that would reconcile sinners to God.

Another expression He used was, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Christ was constrained in His heart until the work was done. You may see how

much the heart of Christ was in reconciling sinners, for when it came time to fulfil His mission, and when the wrath of God was about to fall upon Him, though His human nature recoiled somewhat, He said, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," to show how His human nature was affected. Yet immediately He added, "Not my will, but thy will be done."

The Scripture tells us that He made His soul an offering for sin and that He laid down His life.

And further, after Christ had laid down His life and risen again, note one more expression that shows how willing Christ is to have sinners reconciled and brought to the Father, to be at peace with Him. This is very remarkable in Luke 24:46 and onwards. Consider what was Christ's first preaching: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Here, in this world, in His bodily presence, this may seem to be His last sermon. What was it that He said to them? "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer." Well, in verse 47, "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things." Shortly after, He was caught up into heaven.

The reason I highlight this scripture is that even after Christ had been so notoriously abused in His sufferings, this did not hinder His earnest longing for reconciliation with those who had put Him to death and had so mistreated Him. He said, "It is written that it behoved Christ to suffer," etc. To begin at Jerusalem, and that is what I would have done: that repentance should be preached to all nations, but begin at Jerusalem.

Why begin at Jerusalem? Because Jerusalem was the place where Christ was put to death; it was where He was crowned with thorns,

mocked, given a reed in His hands, spat upon, and where the children chose Barabbas over Him. Yes, they cried, "Away with Him!" They carried Him to the cross and nailed Him until He was dead. Despite this, Christ wanted repentance preached to all nations, but above all, He said, "Think of Jerusalem, and begin at Jerusalem. Let them have it first—Jerusalem, that took away my life, that killed me."

If anything in the world could have turned Christ's heart away from being reconciled to sinners, one would have thought that what they did to Him in Jerusalem would have done so. But He insisted they begin at Jerusalem. This is a notable passage of Scripture, and you will find that the most remarkable conversion and bringing in of sinners was at that sermon of Peter. When Peter charged them, saying they had crucified Christ, it became the most famous conversion of those people who put Christ to death. It was the most significant work of God's reconciling sinners to Himself and Christ bringing in sinners through the preaching of the Gospel. Therefore, in the last sermon that Christ preached from Heaven—as with His first sermon on Earth and the last sermon on Earth—the most solemn sermon was at the dedication of the Temple, which focused entirely on bringing sinners to be reconciled to God.

Similarly, the last sermon He preached from Heaven, or the last He will ever preach until He comes again, is found in Revelation 22:17: "And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him that hears say, 'Come.' And let him that is thirsty say, 'Come,' and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." These are, in effect, the last words spoken at the conclusion of the book—words that Christ would speak until He returns for judgment. He would not speak any more to the children of men in this way until He comes in a new world. But

in this final word, here is the last expression: "Let him that is thirsty, and whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely."

Now, the objections may come in, but first:

Chapter 78.

Objections Answered Concerning the Willingness of God and Christ to Be Reconciled to Sinners

Objection: You may say, why should God do all this? Why should Christ do all this? You tell us that God is so willing to be reconciled and has expressed Himself in such a way, and that Christ is also so willing to be reconciled, expressing Himself by entreating and beseeching. But both God and Christ know that we can do nothing by ourselves, so to what end is all this that you have spoken? It's as if we were to go to Golgotha or the burial places and entreat the dead to rise out of their graves. To what purpose would it be? We are dead in sins and trespasses, and if we can do nothing, all that you have spoken is of little purpose.

To this, I answer:

Firstly, though it is true we are dead in sins and trespasses and are not able to perform any true saving work by our own strength, yet all those expressions of God and Christ in His word, and also the ministers of God in their names, may serve to stir up the common gifts and graces of the Spirit of God within us. It is intended to have them stirred up to the utmost that is possible. People must not think

that because they cannot perform any work that is truly saving in itself, any work of spiritual life, that therefore there is nothing to be done by them.

We should understand that, though the saving works of God are more rare, there are common works of the Spirit that God dispenses to many, yes, to most, and in some degree or another to all—especially to those who live under the sound of the Gospel. There is no one living under the sound of the Gospel who does not possess some common gifts of the Spirit of God, in one degree or another. Now, the Lord would have these stirred up to the utmost (though it may not be in a sanctified way), and these expressions of God and Christ to sinners have a great deal of efficacy in stirring up whatever common gifts of God's Spirit they have. If sinners do not do this, they cannot expect that God will do much towards them.

Consider what power God has already given you and what common gifts you possess, and let these be acted upon to the utmost. Then you may wait for more from God. It is true that none who perish can say that God does not have this to charge against them—that they did not stir up the common gifts of God's Spirit.

Secondly, although we cannot do anything of ourselves, God knows that the best way to convey true saving grace into us, a spirit of life, is through this means rather than others. The Lord chooses this way rather than others. As Paul said to the Galatians, "You have received the Spirit." And how did you receive it? Was it by the preaching of the Law, or by the preaching of the Gospel? Which way conveyed the Spirit of God to you? It was not by the one, but by the other. (Though there is great use in preaching the Law), that which conveys the Spirit and grace into the conscience is the opening of the riches of the treasure of the grace of God in the Gospel.

Therefore, this objection has no strength in it to say that we have no power in ourselves. God entreats and beseeches because, by this means, He puts forth power into the hearts of those He intends to save everlastingly. If we were to entreat dead men to rise, it would be folly for us because we cannot convey any power into them. But it is not in vain for God, because while He is entreating and beseeching, He is able to convey power into them.

Objection

But you say, secondly, why does the Lord need to do all this? God could work it with just a word from Himself. God could presently show forth His almighty power to bring sinners to Himself. He doesn't need to stand praying, entreating, answering objections, and bringing forth arguments. He can, by His almighty power, bring in sinners; He can break the stoutest heart that lives on the earth and pull down the proudest spirit. Therefore, what need does God have to do all this?

Answer

I answer: Who are you, O man, to reason against God? But if you seek reasons, there are many to be given.

Firstly, because God, having to work with a rational creature, will work in a manner suitable to the nature of that creature. If God were to work merely upon stones to raise children to Abraham from them, then He would simply speak the word and say, "Let it be done," and it would be done. But the Lord loves to act in a way that is suitable for a rational creature, and that way is as follows:

Firstly, the understanding should be enlightened, and the heart should be gained and influenced. People should come to do what

they do freely and willingly. Although we have no free will at the beginning, when we do embrace the Gospel, the Lord causes the hearts of people to embrace it willingly. This is a great part of God's Gospel—to show Himself to His creature, working His own purposes but in a manner suitable to that creature.

Moreover, if the Lord were to bring sinners to Himself by His almighty power alone, the beauty and riches of His grace would not appear as they do in this way. If God were to effectually work solely by His hand, the glory of His grace would not shine forth so gloriously. Now, it is the special design that God has in all His works concerning redemption that the glory of the riches of His grace might appear to humans and angels, that they might magnify it. What can magnify grace more than when a sinner sees the various workings of God's mercy towards him? When the Lord has provided a way of reconciliation, and though the soul was reluctant and held back, the Lord still pursued and would not allow the soul to die and perish in its sins. What will magnify grace more than this?

The way of bringing sinners to be reconciled to Himself will be a principal subject for the saints to bless God for throughout all eternity. Therefore, you Christians who have experienced God's work in bringing your hearts to Himself, observe how God works. Note the various ways God has worked with your souls, for those ways will be the subject of your eternal praises in Heaven.

Hence, God proceeds with such diverse expressions so that the riches of His grace might be revealed more fully. Further, by this means, He gains the hearts of sinners to Himself forever. Nothing will draw them to God so much as the declaration of the riches of His grace in the Gospel. When the sinner sees that not only is God reconciled, but also how God has set His heart upon this reconciliation and how

earnest He has been in it, this will engage the sinner's heart to God eternally.

Hence, those sinners who have experienced the most of God's grace in being reconciled are the ones who remain closest to Him. As for those who are only stopped in their sinful paths by the terrors of the Law and are not familiar with the mystery of God's grace in the Gospel, they seldom endure. Although, for a time, out of fear for their consciences, they avoid certain sins, this can often happen even in those without true saving grace—they may refrain from committing a sin in secret for a while (merely out of terror of conscience). But such individuals, who are only influenced by the terrors of the Law, rarely hold out. Even if conscience holds them back for a time, they eventually break free.

However, those who have not only had their consciences enlightened and seen the dangers of sin but have also felt the beams of God's grace and goodness shining into their hearts, their hearts are gained to God in a way that ensures they will never depart from Him. Their hearts will always follow God’s generosity.

The difference between these two can be explained with this analogy: In frosty weather, when water is frozen, there are two ways to access it. The farmer goes out in the morning, finds the water frozen, and breaks the ice. But when he returns the next morning, it is frozen again, as much as before. But when warm weather arrives and melts the ice, it completely disappears. In the same way, the hearts of all sinners are frozen. God comes with the terrors of the Law, shatters the ice, and breaks their hearts. But in time, they freeze over again and become as hard as ever. However, when the Lord comes with the beams of His grace and shines upon them, then their hearts thaw,

the ice melts away, and they flow towards God in a way unlike when He only uses strokes of the Law.

Since the Lord sees that this is the most effective way to engage sinners' hearts to come to Him, He doesn't just exert His almighty power but comes in this manner. Even when the sinner is unable to perceive God's almighty hand at work, they can perceive the shining of God's grace, His goodness, the expressions of His love, and so on. These are clearly evident before the eyes of the sinner, moving the heart, whereas the other aspects are more hidden.

Objection

Thirdly, if God and Christ are so willing to be reconciled with sinners, then you might ask, why aren't more people reconciled? One would think that all sinners in the world should be reconciled to Him, for He can reconcile all. Is it not as easy for God to reconcile one person as it is another? God often tells us that few shall be saved, and Christ Himself says so. Now, this teaching about God's and Christ's willingness to be reconciled—one would think that the whole world should come to be reconciled. Otherwise, how will it be evident that they are truly so willing?

Answer

In response to that, the heart of God and Christ is indeed greatly set on reconciliation with sinners, but in a way that is suitable to other ends that God has. God will not manifest His mercy in such a way that it would interfere with any other work He has to accomplish. So far as the glory of His mercy may be manifested without conflicting with some other purpose God has to fulfil, He extends it—but not to all. Why? Because it would not be suitable to other ends that God has to bring about, for Him to be reconciled to all sinners.

Objection

You might say, "To other ends? Why? Do God's purposes contradict one another? If God's heart is set on reconciliation with sinners, how could this conflict with any other work He has to do?"

Answer

In reply, even though things may seem to us to be in conflict, there is a blessed harmony in God's purposes and His ways. It will one day become clear to all humanity and angels that those things which seem to be in opposition are, in fact, highly advantageous and contribute to the fulfilment and crowning of this blessed work.

Just as in the heavens, there are movements that carry the stars in one direction, while other stars have their own distinct motions, yet there is harmony in the movements of the heavens. In any work that a person undertakes, such as in a clock, there is one wheel that turns in one direction while another wheel turns in the opposite direction, and yet, taken together, they all contribute to the intended function of the clock. Although the wheels appear to be moving contrary to one another, this contradictory motion is precisely how the clock operates correctly.

Similarly, God appears to work in the operations of His grace in one manner and in the works of His justice in another, and they may seem to be in complete opposition. However, in truth, they all work together to accomplish the intended purpose of the Creator. Here, the grace and mercy of God are manifested in entreating and beseeching sinners to be reconciled; it progresses to a certain point, and then, when it has fulfilled its purpose, the stroke of God's justice arrives, moving in a different direction. This entire process contributes to the beauty of God's work, ensuring that He is glorified

in all. Therefore, even though God is so earnest, this doesn't imply that all sinners should be reconciled. The apparent contradiction reveals the beauty of God's work, which will be fully understood in the end—the work of mercy extending this far, and the work of justice extending that far. We are unable to comprehend this fully now, but it will be made clear on that great day.

Further Explanation

Additionally, these expressions of God's willingness are primarily intended for those who belong to His eternal election, but they are revealed in such a general way that no one should exclude themselves. Hence, the charge to ministers of the Gospel is to preach to every creature, because we do not know who belongs to the election. It is for the sake of God's elect that these matters are addressed in such a full and complete manner.

Such teachings should be conveyed to a congregation where there may be many thousands, even if only a few belong to the election of grace. God focuses on them most, though He may also aim at others to lessen their sins or, at times, to heighten them. Therefore, if there are only a few, know that it is for you and your sake that these things are preached. These considerations may suffice to answer such objections.

Chapter 79.

Use 1: Admire God's Infinite Grace in Entreating to be Reconciled with Sinners.

Consider:

1. What it is that God entreats for.
2. Who are entreated.
3. By whom you are entreated.
4. What need God has of you.

Use

In the first place, regarding all that has been said of the willingness of God and Christ to be reconciled with sinners, that they thus entreat sinners, we are taught, firstly, to stand and admire the infinite riches of the grace of God. Especially, you who have felt this work of God effectually upon your hearts—you who have experienced God wooing and seeking your hearts—give God the glory of His grace and marvel at it.

It would be mercy enough for the Lord to offer, even once, to be reconciled with sinners on any terms, or to show them any favour. Merely to offer it, that is grace; that is worthy of admiration, and it is more than God has done for the angels, for He would not do as much for them. But now that God should not only offer but also send to seek after you, to cry out to you again and again, to be persistent with you, to entreat and beseech you—not only through His ministers but through His own Spirit (for that is part of the work)—the Spirit of God comes and woos and beseeches sinners to come in and be reconciled. Oh, stand and marvel at this forever. Let this occupy your heart so that you may give glory to Him, and consider it even more profoundly if you reflect on these four things.

1. What Is It That God Entreats and Beseeches For?

What is it that you are entreated to do? It is something that shall deliver you from the greatest evil that any creature is capable of, and something through which you will receive the greatest good that any creature is capable of. You are entreated not to be miserable but to be happy. You are not only entreated to serve God, to refrain from sinning against Him, and to do the works that He requires for His glory, but you are also entreated to be reconciled, to save your souls from that depth of misery, and to be brought to happiness and glory.

2. Consider Who You Are That Are Entreated

Were there any great worth in you, then you might expect to be entreated, just as people of great status expect to be entreated. But who are you? Wretched beings—damned dust and ashes, firebrands of hell, such as have made yourselves fuel for the everlasting wrath of the eternal God to burn upon, those who deserve to be cast out as an everlasting curse, enemies of God—yet you are the ones entreated.

3. By Whom Are You Entreated?

It is by God Himself, and by Christ, who is God, blessed forever. Even that infinite glory before whom angels adore, before whom they cover their faces; even He, who with one word of His mouth is able to send you all immediately down to hell—this God comes to entreat. And that Christ whom angels adore, even that Christ comes to entreat. For a servant to entreat his master, for a subject to entreat the prince, is not so remarkable; but for the master to entreat the servant, for the prince to entreat the subject—this is what should fill our souls with a spirit of admiration at the unspeakable condescension of the most blessed Majesty.

4. What Need Has God of You?

Though you should perish and die eternally, it would be no great matter to Him. God could still have His glory out of your eternal ruin. But, to that end—that He might break your hearts—He entreats and beseeches you. Oh, marvel at the riches of His grace, and give Him the glory that is due unto Him. Begin to do now that which you will do for all eternity when you come into His glorious presence in Heaven.

Chapter 80

Use 2 and 3

Secondly, the more God manifests His grace, the more desperately wicked is the heart of man to stand out against God. Oh, wretched, cursed heart that can stand out against God; that can resist the offer of grace in the Gospel. I say, this is a cursed heart, to stand out against the offer of grace, even if it were no more than that. If it were only declared that Christ has come into the world to save sinners, God expects that all those to whom Christ is revealed should come flocking to Him and cry out mightily to God for mercy in Christ. But when God not only offers His Son but also comes through the ministry of His Word and the work of His Spirit to draw your hearts to Him, and yet you still stand out against God, against all these gracious beginnings, drawings, and tender expressions of His love, then, oh, cursed, stubborn, hardened heart that would stand out against all these!

You cannot now plead, "Oh, the temptation was strong to draw my heart away from God to such and such sinful ways." Was temptation strong? Has any temptation ever drawn as alluringly as God has drawn you through His Gospel? It is impossible that the Devil and all the world could draw more alluringly to any sin than God draws you to Himself.

Oh, these entreaties of God, this gracious way toward sinners, will be the greatest aggravation of the sins of men that ever was or can be imagined. For now, just know this: the mercies of God, which will be the subject of the saints' rejoicing and the blessing of His name for all eternity, will be your greatest misery if you stand against them. That is a sad thought for any sinner—that the mercy which the saints will be eternally admiring and blessing God for will become your misery, your secret wound, and your greatest terror. That is the second point.

USE 3

Oh, rebuke your own wretched heart that has stood out against God for so long, all these days of your life. Certainly, the consideration of standing out against any command of God, when God comes to enlighten a man's conscience and the soul comes to understand with whom he has to deal, has a mighty power to break the heart of man. When I come to see that I have stood against all those loving drawings, all those wooings of the Gospel, it is that which will rend your hearts. Rend your hearts and not your garments, for the Lord is merciful; this is not just a breaking of the heart but a rending of the heart when the grace of God is revealed to it.

Chapter 81.

Use 4: To Strengthen Our Faith; If God Were Reconciled When We Were Enemies, He Will Not Cast Us Off for Every Infirmity. Objections Answered.

Fourthly, the consideration of this may be a mighty strength to the faith of those sinners who have (in some measure) been wrought upon by the grace of God. If the Lord has manifested such an abundance of strength of spirit in seeking to reconcile sinners to Himself, then certainly, once sinners are reconciled, the heart of God will forever be with them. He will not lose the fruit of such grace as this. If once He has brought you in, and that in such a way of mercy (Christ having accomplished it), it cannot be an easy thing that will turn God's heart away from you.

There was the goodness of God towards Adam in Paradise. Yes, but it was not such a measure of God’s goodness towards him that it could not admit of any breach between God and him. However, the heart of God is so much invested in this work of bringing sinners to be reconciled to Himself that it is impossible that there should ever be such a breach again, or that they should ever prove to be enemies. Therefore, let this strengthen your heart. Whenever you begin to have jealous thoughts about God, remember your initial calling to Him.

"I walked in a wretched, sinful way for many years, but God came to me, showed me my evil ways, and revealed His grace to me. Yes, even when I resisted His grace, He pursued me, would not let me be at peace, and manifested His grace more and more, until He won my heart to Himself. How can I now think that the God who did all this would take advantage of every infirmity? That now, every sin He sees

in me would create such a breach between Him and my soul that He would cast me away from Him? How can I think this? Surely, it is a wrong to the grace of God in the Gospel."

Objection: "Yes, but here is the problem: because of my loose living, I cannot believe that things were ever true; that I was ever truly converted."

Answer: To that, I respond with two points.

First, if you can honestly say before God, "The Lord knows that there is no weapon of enmity in my heart against God, that I know to be a sin which He has revealed to me, but my heart is set against it. I can appeal to God in this. And there is no duty that God requires of me, but my heart is with it, if only the Lord will reveal it to me." Now, if this is the state of your heart, having previously felt the work of God drawing you to Christ, this is a strong argument that surely God and you are not enemies.

Secondly, if you can say this: there is no argument so prevalent with me to prevent me from sinning as this—fear of breaking the peace between God and myself. This is the very thing that makes my sin truly sting my soul because, through it, I lose some of the sweetness of the assurance of my peace with God. Can you say this? Keep your heart in such a frame, that although you have many weaknesses, you can still say, "Whatever sin the Lord reveals to me, my heart is against it, and whatever duty the Lord requires of me, I know my heart is with it. And if there is anything I do not know, oh! that I might know it more and more. There is nothing I fear about sin so much as the fact that it breaks the peace between God and my soul."

Is this true for your poor soul? Then, I pronounce, in the name of God, peace be unto you. Though your heart is not as you would like it

to be, you can certainly conclude this: God, who manifested such grace in drawing your heart to Himself at first, will not cast you off. Certainly, God had some greater purpose in working so wonderfully upon you than to reject you now. Except that the Lord had some great thoughts in glorifying Himself through you and doing you good, He would never have worked on your heart as He has done.

There are others who live under the light of the Gospel, yet the Lord never speaks to their hearts as He has spoken to you, nor does He draw their hearts inwardly by His Spirit as He has done to you. The Lord has not had such profound intentions to glorify His name through them in the day of His grace, as He has had towards you. Therefore, surely, the Lord intends to do great things through you; the grace He has bestowed upon you, which has been so powerful, will carry you through all difficulties. Indeed, the grace of God has been strong, and it will remain strong, so build your confidence upon it.

If you find you have a hard heart, do not think that because your heart is hard, God's heart is not towards you. No, instead say, "Because my heart is hard, I will look to God to break it, and I will bring my frozen and cold heart to the beams of God's grace and stand under these heavenly influences." If you are aware of the hardness of your heart and you sit down sullenly and heavily, believing that God will reject you because of it, this is not the way to soften your heart. Rather, remember how the grace of God has been towards you and how His heart is inclined to be reconciled with sinners. Recall what He has done for sinners like you, and keep your heart under the warm beams of the Gospel. By doing this, you will gain much more than by sitting down in a sullen and discontented way.

Plants that grow under the warmth of the sun grow better, and their fruit ripens more fully than those that grow out of the sun's reach. Similarly, the heart that remains under the warmth of God's mercy and goodness, as expressed in the Gospel, thrives abundantly more than those who lie down sullenly and discontentedly. This is a mighty encouragement for all sinners to come and be reconciled, a powerful and strong encouragement. The Lord invites and beseeches through the Gospel and sends His ministers to do so, commanding them to act in His name. What should hinder anyone, but that any sinner—none excepted—should come and be reconciled?

We do not know who among us will not be reconciled, so we may say of any particular sinner, "What should hinder you from coming to be reconciled?" And if God entreats, Christ entreats, and ministers entreat, and you entreat, what prevents you from being reconciled? Just as the Ethiopian eunuch said, "Here is water; why should I not be baptised?" So, here is mercy; why should you not be reconciled?

Do you have such thoughts? "Seeing that God is willing to be reconciled to sinners, when I get home, I resolve to throw myself before the Lord Christ and cry to Him for reconciliation, for I am damned and undone forever otherwise, and I hear there is a way to be reconciled to Him. This shall be my work now; I will set about it immediately. I will never cease crying to God until I find His grace coming to me." Are you resolved upon this? Then go on, fall down before Him, and cry to God for mercy. Make this point a part of your prayer: "Lord, I have heard that You are willing to be reconciled. Now, Lord, here is a wretched sinner who comes to be reconciled to You. What hinders us now when both are entreating?"

Imagine two people who have fallen out with each other, but now both are being moved, and one professes not only to be willing but

earnestly desires to be reconciled, and the other also comes and expresses the same desire. Surely, these two will agree. Now, it is true, that often between man and man, their expressions may be superficial, and there may not be sincerity in their hearts. When two are at odds and one is approached, he may say, "Oh yes, I am willing." Then the other may say the same, but their hearts may not be right with each other.

But in this case between God and your soul, be confident that on God's side, it is entirely real. Ensure that your heart is sincere in desiring peace with God, fully understanding what you desire when you seek peace with Him—that you will not be at peace with any sin, and that you earnestly desire peace with Him. When you attain it, your heart will praise God, saying, "I will live to the praise of God forever, and that shall be my endeavour."

"But will God be at peace?" Yes, God will gain as much as you will from it, and by it, He will achieve what He especially intended when creating the world. The great design that God had in making the world was to magnify the riches of His mercy, and if you are one whom God has chosen to demonstrate His mercy and grace, He will gain glory to His name, which He intended when He made the world.

Therefore, though your soul is precious to you, know that God’s glory is more precious to Him than your soul can be to you. Thus, God is more desirous of your life (along with those who shall be saved hereafter) than you can be of your own salvation. This is a certain truth, for God gains more by the salvation of a soul than the soul gains for itself. You gain something, but God gains much more. So, if God is pursuing something that concerns you so deeply, and you know today that God's heart is more strongly set upon it than yours,

one would think this should be a mighty encouragement for any sinner to come and be reconciled.

Therefore, continue on your path. Let not temptation turn your heart away, even though God may seem to be an enemy to you. We know that Joseph's heart was as much towards his brothers as theirs were towards him. Joseph dealt with them harshly, as though he were their enemy, yet even then, his heart was with them. So, continue seeking the Lord. Though God may seem to be your enemy, know that His heart is as much toward you as yours is toward Him, and Christ views you as one through whom He will be glorified forever.

The good Lord say Amen. It shall be so.

FINIS.

GOD'S PRESENT MERCIES TO HIS PEOPLE ARE ARGUMENTS OF FUTURE MERCIES

Preached at Saviours, Southwark; May 2, 1641.

Hosea 2:14 and onwards

"Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came

up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi, and shalt call me no more Baali."

This prophet was sent to the ten tribes, to apostate Israel. God threatened dreadful evils against them, and yet, from the beginning of this 14th verse to the end of the chapter, He makes gracious promises to them.

I shall only premise that the purpose of the Holy Spirit here is to show mercy—to reveal God's mercy to apostatising Israel in a way of conjugal union. Though she had gone a-whoring from God through her idolatrous worship, God was willing, upon her repentance, to take her back and marry her unto Himself. Therefore, the prophet uses expressions that signify God's willingness to marry her again, in the same manner as one manifests conjugal love to a spouse. This premise will help us understand many expressions in both the words read and the succeeding part of the chapter that would otherwise be obscure, especially that in verse 14: "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her."

This phrase may be taken to mean bringing her into affliction and then speaking comfort to her, but that is not the intent here. It draws from the custom of marriage, where the bridegroom would take his spouse out of the city into the fields, which were often heath and common land, and thus called wilderness, to rejoice with her there, and then bring her into the city and into his father's house. I could show this from various scriptures, especially from the Song of Solomon: "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness?" The Holy Spirit takes this allusion, meaning that God will deal graciously with Israel as one who marries a spouse and carries her out to the field to rejoice with her and speak comfortably to her.

The main doctrinal conclusion I intend to draw will come from these words: "I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope." For I shall speak to no more than one point of doctrine raised from those words: "I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope."

It will be necessary, therefore, before telling you the doctrinal point, to explain these words. The valley of Achor was where Achan was stoned, and you can read the story in the seventh chapter of the Book of Joshua. Due to the trouble that the people of Israel had because of Achan, this valley was named the "Valley of Achor," which means "the valley of trouble" (valla tribulationis).

Now, it is true that many interpret this as meaning that God will turn the troubles of His people into doors of hope that let in mercies to them, and there is indeed truth in that doctrinal point. However, that is not what this text is specifically conveying. Though the name signifies trouble, the valley of Achor was actually a delightful, fruitful valley, given by God immediately after the entrance into the land of Canaan.

God here still alludes to the way of marriage in expressing His love to the ten tribes, saying that He would take them back and marry them to Himself in the manner that marriages were conducted among the Jews. Among them, when a man took a spouse, according to his status, he would give her gifts, usually some field or piece of ground. If he were wealthy, he would give a larger, more fruitful piece of land, corresponding to his wealth. Thus, God says, "I will give you the valley of Achor for a door of hope." Just as when you take a spouse, you endow her with land as a token of the love she can expect from you in the future, so will I give you the valley of Achor. I will bestow fresh and choice mercies upon you as a dowry, a testimony of the abundance of future blessings you shall receive from me.

This is the intent and sense of the Holy Spirit in these words. Just as God gave the people of Israel the land of Canaan, starting with the valley of Achor as the door of hope to the mercies they would enjoy, so it is here. That this valley was a delightful and fruitful one is evident from Isaiah 65:10: "And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me." Here, God promises the valley of Achor as a blessing to those who seek Him, a place where herds would lie down, showing it was a very fruitful area.

Therefore, though the name means trouble, God still promises it to His people as a token of His mercy. Having now established the meaning of this phrase, we come to the doctrinal conclusion that is to be grounded upon this scripture.

The doctrine, then, is this:

Doctrine: That the Mercies God Bestows Upon His Church and His People Are Doors of Hope to Future Mercies

The present mercies that God grants to His people are doors of hope to future mercies. All God's mercies to His saints are inlets to further mercies. This is the high privilege of the saints of God; it does not belong to everyone.

Indeed, when the wicked receive anything from God, they may write their *Ne plus ultra* upon it—this is likely to be their portion, and they may marvel that they have received anything at all. However, God's mercies to His people can all be called doors of hope. The name Joseph can be written upon them, as we read in Genesis 30:24: when Rachel had conceived and borne a son, she called his name Joseph and said, "The Lord shall add another." When she had one, she made it a pledge of another, saying, "The Lord shall add another."

So it is with God's mercies to His people; they are "Josephs," and we may conclude that God will add more. When God delivered His people out of Egypt, Exodus 15:13 says, "Thou hast guided them unto thy holy habitation." That deliverance, Moses took as a certain argument of God's further mercy towards them: "Thou hast guided them." When God began with David in 2 Samuel 5:12, to show even a little mercy, an outward mercy, David concluded that God had established him in the kingdom. How so? God had shown a great favour outwardly to David, and David could conclude that the favour he had received was merely an inlet to more, an argument of his establishment in the kingdom. "God has delivered, and he will deliver," says the Apostle.

Just as God makes way in His wrath through lesser judgements upon the wicked (Psalm 78:45), so God makes way for His mercy by present, lesser mercies to His children.

In the prosecution of this point, we shall explore:

1. The reasons why this comes to pass.
2. An answer to a question about God's interruption of His mercies.
3. How we shall come to know when God's present mercies are but preparations for future mercies—what kinds of mercies these are and how to recognise them as inlets to other mercies.
4. The uses of this doctrine: that God's mercies to His people are merely inlets to greater mercies.

Reason 1

This comes from the fullness of mercy that is in God. There is such an infinite ocean, stream, and treasure of mercy in the Lord that when it begins to flow towards the saints, the people of God, the

beginnings of it are merely preparations to let out more. The Scripture says that God delights in mercy (Micah 7:18). Now, what a man delights in, when he once begins, is merely to draw out more.

God's mercies are called His riches—God is rich in mercy. The wisdom of God, the power of God, and the justice of God are not called God's riches; they are called His glory. "I will make my glory to pass by," says God, and He proclaims His mercy. Now, because God's mercies are His delight, His riches, His glory, when He has fit subjects to pour them out upon, when He begins to let them flow, these beginnings are testimonies of a fountain yet to be communicated.

Reason 2

All God's mercies to His people come out of love. *Amor nescit nimium*—love knows no excess. It knows not any such expression as "too much." There is nothing too much for love; love must not be limited. If love begins to be shown, that which comes from love will have no bounds.

Now, all the goodness that God shows to His people comes from love, from infinite love, and therefore one fruit of goodness draws on another. Indeed, when God's goodness comes out of general bounty, it is of another manner; it stops soon. But when it comes from His entire, infinite love, it does not stop.

There is another argument that, when added to these two, makes the case even stronger, and that is...

Reason 3

The goodness of God to His people is a fruit of the covenant. It comes not only out of love but also as the result of an everlasting covenant that God has made with them—a sure covenant. Now, in the covenant of grace that God has made with His people, there is a connection of all mercies, a concatenation of all the goodness of God. The treasure of mercy is in the covenant, and there is an exceeding strength of mercy in the covenant to overcome all hindrances and oppositions. There, mercy is bound to them by truth.

As we read about the covenant between Jonathan and David in 1 Samuel 20:15, David made a covenant with Jonathan that he would never cut off his loving-kindness from him or from his house after him. In the same way, God has made a covenant with all His people that He will never cut off His loving-kindness from them. He has made no such covenant with the wicked. Though God may show them some favour for the present, He has not made a covenant that He will never cut off His mercy from them. You may have an abundance of favours today, but they may be eternally cut off from you. However, the saints of God are in such a blessed condition that God not only shows them mercy for the present, but He has also made a covenant with them never to cut off His loving-kindness, even though they have many weaknesses, distempers, frailties, and infirmities.

Reason 4

The goodness of God to His people, as it comes from an eternal fountain, is also let out for the accomplishment of eternal ends. God's intentions in His goodness to His saints are to raise up for Himself an eternal name of praise and honour in the world, not only here but in heaven, in the highest heavens, for all eternity. That is God's

purpose, not just in some mercies but in every mercy that God bestows upon a saint, upon His children.

Every mercy—every outward mercy—has this end: to raise up for Himself an eternal name of praise. Therefore, do not despise any mercy, even if it seems insignificant, for God's purpose in the smallest mercy you have, even in every crumb of bread you eat, is to raise up an eternal name of praise for Himself. However, consider the greatest mercy that God bestows upon the most worldly person through His general bounty; God does not have the same eternal purpose in that as He does with His saints. He may take notice of them for a while, and then it ends.

But in His goodness towards His people, God intends to construct a glorious edifice, to raise up a building that shall be to His eternal praise. Therefore, just as when one lays a stone to raise a high building, one lays it in such a way as to prepare for another stone to be laid upon it. If I were merely piling a heap of stones, I wouldn't care how I lay them. But if I intend to raise a building, I carefully lay one stone as it prepares for another.

In the same way, God deals with the wicked; He heaps His mercies upon them, letting them come as they may. But when He dispenses His mercy to His people, He intends a building. He lays the mercies in that order and rank—first one, then another—so that when He has laid one, if we understand what that mercy is, we may see an impression in that mercy for another, as though it were calling for another mercy to be laid upon it.

These are the special grounds why God's mercies to His people are but preparations for further and greater mercies. However, to avoid any unnecessary delay, especially in concluding this matter, I will

pass over anything that might be further spoken about these grounds.

Objection

But you will say, we see it otherwise, and we find it otherwise, that there are usually interruptions in God's mercies even to His people. When God comes to deal in a way of mercy with His Church, He goes a little way, and then He stops, and then there come heavy judgments, heavy afflictions soon after.

Answer

Now, to answer that:

1. We must necessarily acknowledge that there may be some interruptions, for the present, in God's mercies to His people. However, there is a difference between an interruption and a cutting off. It may seem to be interrupted for a time, but God's mercy still runs its course, even if out of sight. As it is said, there is a river that runs fifty miles underground and then emerges again. In the same way, God's mercies towards His people may seem hidden for a while. His children often have their share in His judgments; many times, God brings judgment, and then He lets the wicked prosper. Yet, His justice still runs its course, hidden underground, and will emerge again.

This is very instructive, especially concerning God's dealings with His people when bringing them out of captivity and repairing the wall and the temple. God had made many glorious promises about what He would do for them in returning them from captivity and

rebuilding their city. Well, after the seventy years of captivity ended, God began to work wonderfully and gloriously for them. However, if you observe and read the story, you will find that from the beginning of their return from captivity to the completion of God's mercy in building the temple and the wall, as much time passed as they had spent in captivity. That was seventy years. They were seventy years in captivity, and from the start of their restoration to its fulfilment, it took another seventy years. Yet, the goodness of God ran its course; there was always an eye of mercy upon them, even if it seemed to cease temporarily. In the end, it carried them through.

This is particularly relevant for us today, as we are often quick to become discontented and troubled when God is in the process of reformation. Because we do not receive everything immediately, as we wish, we are ready to complain. "Oh! How long has Parliament been sitting, and so little has been done!" But consider God's way with His own people: despite such specific promises of glorious deliverance, it still took seventy years for the work to be fully accomplished. Therefore, if God is in a way of mercy towards us, gradually moving forward—sometimes a little now, sometimes a little later—we should not grumble. Mercy is still progressing, even if there may be temporary interruptions.

2. Often, we think there is an interruption when, in reality, there is none at all—only our misunderstanding. If we understood things rightly, we would see a most beautiful concatenation and connection of mercies, with no interruption at all.

3. What we perceive as an interruption might actually be one of our greatest mercies. God’s withholding of one kind of mercy may be a preparation for another, even greater mercy. Therefore, we should not be discouraged.

4. We are to consider that, although this is the goodness of God towards His people, He does expect that His people should continue with Him in the way of His goodness, and should align themselves with Him in the way of His mercy. Otherwise, there may be a great interruption for the present. In Hosea 7:1, God complains about His people, saying, "When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered." When God would have healed them—when He is in a way of mercy, expecting that they should follow Him in this way of mercy—their iniquity is discovered. Then they break out into notorious iniquities and sins, which make a stop and shut the door of mercy against them.

Therefore, we are to be warned concerning our public sins, especially now that God is in a gracious way of public mercies. There has never been a time when we needed more caution to be watchful and careful in our conduct, so that our iniquity is not discovered. For now, God is about to heal us; He is thinking to heal us. Oh! Let us take heed of our lives. And so it should be the particular care of every soul. Is God about to heal? Is God in a way of mercy towards your family, your body, or your soul at any time? Take heed to yourself now, that your iniquity may not be discovered. For now, the devil will come and tempt you to break out into some notorious sin, aiming to cut off the way of God's grace and shut that door of mercy which God is now opening to you.

In Zechariah 8:15-16, God says, "So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear you not. And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour, and love no false oaths, for all these are things that I hate," saith the Lord. Notice the expression of God, which is very relevant to us. We may well apply that 15th verse to the condition of

England at this time: "I thought in these days to do well unto this people, and to the house of Judah." But regarding the things I should do, says God, pay attention to yourselves. You must not think that when I am proceeding in a way of mercy, you may act as you please. I will do these things, but it is upon this condition that you follow God in that way. If God opens a door for us, if we do not want it to be shut, He expects that we should enter through that door—that is, to align ourselves with Him in that way of mercy that He is extending.

But then, seeing that our sins have caused the interruption, it is not always the case that God's present mercies are certain signs of further mercies.

How shall we know when we can draw an assurance from the mercy we have now, that there are further mercies intended for us?

You may remember that, at the beginning of this point, I told you it was a privilege of God's saints. Yet everyone will be ready to seize upon it and conclude for themselves: "Well, God is a God full of mercy, and therefore, because He has begun to show mercy to me, He will continue. Surely, I shall find favour, for it has been His way and course to deal thus with His people, and therefore, since He has delivered me from one evil, He will deliver me from another."

(Brethren) it is the usual way of wicked men to seize the privileges of the saints as if they were their own. We have a notable example of this in the prophecy of Jeremiah, which is worthy of our observation. In Jeremiah 21:2, there is an example of Zedekiah. Zedekiah was a wicked man, yet he flattered himself in this, and promised himself that he would receive the same privileges as the people of God had in former times. Notice what he says: "Inquire, I pray thee, of the Lord for us; Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, makes war against us. If so

be, the Lord will deal with us according to all His wondrous works, that he may go up from us."

Mark (says Zedekiah to Jeremiah), "Oh! Inquire, oh! Let us know the mind of God, whether He will deal with us according to all His wondrous works." God had dealt with His people according to His wonderful works; He had dealt wonderfully for His people. And Zedekiah, a wicked man, along with the wicked people who were with him, were ready to flatter themselves with the hope that God would deal with them as He had done with His people before—wonderfully—but they were deceived.

So, when people hear of the privileges of the saints and presume to promise themselves the same from God as His people have, they will be mistaken. The promises made in Scripture of mercy are the inheritance of God's saints. In Isaiah 54:17, it says, "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord," when God made a promise of mercy to His people. But, (says He), "This is the heritage of My servants." It belongs not to all; it is their inheritance, their portion. What have others to do with the inheritance of God's people?

When a saint of God looks into the word of God and reads it, he may see every promise, every expression of God's goodness, as part of his inheritance and take it. It is his inheritance, even if he does not inherit worldly riches or has little means. He may know that he is an heir of all the glorious promises written in the Book of God—they are his inheritance.

A wicked man, when he reads the Scriptures, can take no such delight in it. For indeed, he may read many promises, but they are not his inheritance; they belong to God's people. There is a great difference between an heir riding through his father's land and a stranger riding through it. Just the same difference exists between a

carnal man reading the Scriptures and a saint. An heir rides through his land, sees the fruitful fields and pleasant meadows, and says, "This is my land." But a stranger rides through them, commends them, yet knows, "They do not belong to me."

So, a saint reads the Scriptures, sees the expressions of God's goodness, and says, "These are my inheritance," while a carnal heart says no such thing. Therefore, God's mercies to His people are inlets to further mercies. If they are not so to you, then you cannot conclude, "Oh! I was in such danger and such extremity, and God delivered me from that; therefore, if I come into a similar situation, He will deliver me again." No, you cannot say that.

There was a notable expression by Hezekiah in Isaiah 38. When God delivered him from sickness (as is thought by divines, it was the plague), Hezekiah concludes, "In love to my soul, thou hast delivered me from the pit of corruption." This is an excellent conclusion that a child of God may make if ever delivered from the danger of the plague: "In love to my soul, Lord, thou hast delivered me, and I shall go to the house of the Lord; I shall yet have further mercy."

It may be that some of you have had the plague in your houses or even upon yourselves, and God has delivered you. You may take it as an argument that God will deliver you again because He delivered you from that. Yet, unless you are like Hezekiah, a gracious man or woman, you cannot conclude that God has delivered you from that pit of corruption. For God's preservations of wicked people are, many times, reservations for greater evils, as I might show you, but I see I must hasten.

Well then, still, how may we know when we may draw an argument from God's present mercies for future ones?

The First Discovery of Whether God's Present Mercies Are Inlets to Future Ones

When, in a mercy, there is some special discovery of God unto His people—(I say) some special and glorious discovery of God in a mercy, as in His mercy to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Solomon, David, etc.—there were glorious discoveries of God's presence. When Jacob was delivered from Esau, Jacob said, "I have seen thee as the face of God." It may be read thus: "I have seen thee after the face of God; after I have seen the face of God, I have seen thee."

Yes, that is sweet and comforting indeed, when we can see a mercy after we have seen the face of God. We can see the face of God in the way of His mercy, and after we see the face of God, then we look upon the mercy and gather this argument. If you have an eye that, in a mercy, can see the face of God there, and after seeing the face of God in the mercy, then it is something indeed.

In Isaiah 26:12, it says, "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us; thou wilt, for thou also hast wrought all our works in us." Note the argument: "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace." Why? "For thou hast wrought all our works in us." This Scripture is spoken concerning the deliverance of the people of Israel from their captivity. God began to deliver them, and those who were godly were sure to have complete deliverance. "Thou wilt ordain," they said with certainty. Why? "For thou hast wrought all our works for us." For it is not Cyrus but a remarkable hand of God upon the spirit of Cyrus, and all that is done in our deliverance is done through the mighty hand of God. "Thou hast wrought all our works in us." The work is a work above nature; it is a wonderful work of God, and therefore we are sure that thou wilt ordain peace for us.

When God appears wonderfully and remarkably in a mercy to His people, they then conclude that there will be further mercies. There is an excellent verse for that in Psalm 75:1, "Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks, for that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare." Mark this, "for that thy name is near thy wondrous works declare." O Lord! (as if they had said) we see thy wondrous works, we see thy face, thy power, thy glory, thy mercy, and thy goodness. We see thy mercy as a creating mercy, and therefore thy name is near. O! Thou art good yet more and more, for thy wondrous works declare it.

Brethren, when God's mercies are creating mercies, then we may expect that they will be perfect mercies. For though, in generation, there may be a defect, in creation there is never a defect. Many times, in generation, a limb or a member may be lacking, but all that God creates, He creates perfectly. Now, when the mercies of God are, as it were, created mercies—not generated out of secondary causes, but where we see a kind of created power—then surely they will be perfect.

Now, brethren, before we come to apply this to our own hearts, we cannot but apply this as a strong argument to raise up our thoughts, to consider the mercies we enjoy this day as a door of hope for us. For if ever a people have experienced created mercies, we have. If ever a people could see the face of God in a way of mercy, then we may do so this day. If ever a people could say, "Thou, O Lord, hast wrought all our works for us," we may well say it. Therefore, we may draw the conclusion that the Church did: "Thou wilt ordain peace, for thou hast wrought all our works for us." Surely, brethren, God's name is nigh. God seemed to be afar off from England for a long time, but God is coming near; His name is near, for His wondrous works that He has done of late declare it. But that is the first.

The Second Discovery of Whether God's Present Mercies Are Inlets to Future Ones

When God's mercies are spiritual mercies, they are certain inlets to further mercies. A spiritual mercy never comes alone but makes way for more. I will give you just one text for that, as time outruns me, in Ezekiel 39:29: "Neither will I hide my face anymore from them," saith God. Why? "For I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel," saith the Lord God.

Mark this: "I will hide my face no more from them." Why? "For I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel," saith the Lord God. Brethren, if ever any nation had the Spirit of God poured out upon them, certainly we have. God pours out His Spirit upon His people, upon private Christians, and upon ministers in a wonderfully abundant manner. And how has He poured out His Spirit upon our Worthies assembled in Parliament?

Now, let this be a good argument: "Neither will I hide my face anymore from them, for I have poured out my Spirit upon them." Then it is an argument for us this day that God will not hide His face from us because He has poured out His Spirit upon us. If there be any people under heaven who have the Spirit of God upon them, certainly the people of England have it at this day. And this is God's own promise and argument; you may plead it with God in prayer, that He will never hide His face from those upon whom He has poured out His Spirit. Not only can you use this in general, but you may also apply it to yourselves in particular.

Has God poured out His Spirit upon any of your souls? You may make this conclusion—it is God's own conclusion—that He will never hide His face from you because He has poured His Spirit upon you. That is the second point.

The Third Discovery of Whether God's Present Mercies Are Inlets to Future Ones

A mercy is a forerunner of further mercy when it is obtained by faith and prayer in the Covenant of Grace. That mercy, which prayer and the exercise of faith obtain, is certainly and infallibly a forerunner of further mercy. God has not finished with that people, or that soul, in a way of mercy, where He bestows mercy as a fruit of prayer and an exercise of faith in the Covenant.

If prayer is the key to open Heaven when it is shut to us, then it will, even more so, keep Heaven open when it is already open. We know that the excellence of prayer is that it is the great key of Heaven, the golden key that opens it when it is shut. Therefore, surely, prayer can keep Heaven open.

If ever a mercy was obtained by prayer, certainly the mercy we have now, at present here in England, is a mercy obtained by prayer. If ever there was a Parliament obtained by prayer since England became a nation, certainly this Parliament was one. We may call the name of this Parliament "Samuel," as it was asked of God.

What have been the earnest cries of God's people, even of many who are now dead and gone, but for these times? Now, that which is a fruit not only of the prayers of God's people for the present but is also the harvest of the many prayers of the saints and worthies of God in former ages, who are now gone and whose souls are triumphing in Heaven—I say, that which is the harvest of all their prayers surely cannot be one single mercy. It must be a mercy that lets in others, a mercy that is a door of hope to further mercies. That is the third note.

The Fourth Discovery of Whether God's Present Mercies Are Inlets to Future Ones

That mercy which leads us to the God of mercy is certainly an inlet to further mercies. Whatever leads our souls to the God of mercy, we may conclude that this mercy will bring abundant good with it. I must not elaborate on various Scriptures, but simply refer you to that of David in 2 Samuel 7—the whole chapter, which you may read at your leisure—where God's mercy to him led him to the God of mercy, upon which there was such a promise of the continuance of mercy for a long time.

The Fifth Discovery of Whether God's Present Mercies Are Inlets to Future Ones

That mercy (I beseech you to observe it) which is to a soul or a people an engagement to duty is certainly a door to more mercy. Whatever mercy God bestows upon you in particular, or upon a nation, if that mercy is made an engagement to duty, then it is certainly a door to more mercy.

Take it this way: Just as when we account our duties as mercies, our duties will hold; so, when God's mercies are turned into duties, then God's mercies will endure. It is an infallible sign of one who will persevere in duty and will never fail. If you wish to know whether you are likely to persevere in duty or not—if you say, "Oh, I am afraid I shall fall off," or "Oh, if I were sure I would persevere to the end, it would comfort me"—then would you have an infallible sign that your duties will hold to the end? Take this for one: If your soul regards every duty as a mercy to you, every command to duty as God's mercy to you every day, then I dare stake my soul that such a soul will persevere.

As it is a certain evidence of perseverance in duty when a duty is regarded as a mercy, so, I say, it is a certain evidence that there will be a perseverance in mercy when mercy is turned into duty. When mercy becomes an engagement to duty and turns into duty, then it is a certain sign there will be a perseverance in mercy, just as when duty is regarded as mercy, there will be perseverance in duty.

The Sixth Discovery of Whether God's Present Mercies Are Inlets to Future Ones

The mercy that humbles the heart is an inlet to further mercy. It is very noteworthy, as seen in 2 Samuel 7, which you may read through in two or three places in that chapter: when God had promised David great things, observe David's spirit was as low as ever. "What am I?" says David, and he cries out, "Thou art great, O Lord!" He doesn't say, "Thou hast made me great," but "Thou art great, O Lord!"

In verse 26, he says, "Let thy name be magnified forever." His spirit remained low. He wasn't taken up with thoughts of, "Oh, God has promised me a perpetual kingdom for my posterity, and now I am great, and God has magnified me." No, instead, he says, "What am I? And let thy name be magnified, and be thou great, O Lord."

When this is the attitude of a soul, or of a people, that when God advances them in a way of mercy, they cry out, "Oh! Let me be low, and be anything as long as God's name is magnified," then certainly this mercy is a forerunner of further mercy. Just as it is a great sign of the strength of faith, and is acceptable to God, when in adversity, even when God seems to oppose him, a guilty heart can still believe, and the heart can rise up and not sink into the depths of adversity.

Observe this: just as when the heart can rise in adversity, it is a strong sign of an enduring and precious faith, so too, when the heart

can humble itself in the height of prosperity and remain low, there is abundant grace in that soul which is acceptable to God, and He intends much good for it.

The Seventh Discovery of Whether God's Present Mercies Are Inlets to Future Ones

When we are careful to consecrate the first fruits of our mercies to God, this becomes an inlet to further mercies. So it was here. This valley of Achor was near Jericho, serving as evidence to them that they would have the whole land of Canaan.

Now, what did they do at Jericho? They devoted everything to God—the entire city and its outskirts were dedicated to Him. They consecrated the first fruits of Canaan upon entering the land where Jericho was, and this valley of Achor was right by it. When God began to give them possession of that good land, they devoted the first fruits to God, and thus it became evidence that they would possess the good land afterward.

So, when God begins to show mercy and goodness, whether to a people, family, or a particular man or woman, if they begin by dedicating the first fruits of that mercy to God, it becomes a clear sign that it is a door of hope for further mercy.

Thus, I have concluded the explanation. I am sorry I have no more time for the application, and I will cover the remaining points as briefly as possible, as it is the last point I most intend to discuss.

USE 1

If it is true that God's mercies, even present mercies, are inlets to future ones, and when God is in a way of mercy, His people may

expect greater mercies to follow, then the following consequence arises: it is, therefore, a vile and wretched folly for any to think that the only time to seek God is during times of affliction.

This is refuted by this point: if, when God is in a way of mercy, His people understand that more mercy is on the way, then it follows that when God is in a way of mercy, it is the most fitting time to pray to Him. That is the most suitable time to pray—when God is showing goodness and mercy.

But in the world today, it is quite the opposite. People will pray to God; but when? When God has them at a disadvantage, in times of sickness, affliction, or on their deathbeds, when God's justice is against them, and His wrath is upon them, and they see themselves plunging into the bottomless gulf. Then they will pray and cry for mercy! Oh, this shows that you are a stranger to the ways of God, to the mind of God, and to the covenant of God.

If you were one of God's people, you would know that the best time to pray is when God is in a way of mercy, for one mercy leads to another. I would argue this: is it more likely that God, during this time of patience and long-suffering, would deny you mercy? Is it likely that He should deny you mercy now? Yet, when the day of His wrath and justice comes, then He should grant you mercy? What an absurd understanding that is!

You cry that God will deny you mercy and grace now, in this day of His patience and long-suffering, and will He deny it now? Do you then think He will give it to you in the day of His wrath and justice, upon your sickbed or deathbed, which may be a day of vengeance and wrath? If you have wisdom for your soul, seek God while mercy is still coming, and while He is in a way of mercy, for that is the most fitting time to pray. Therefore, be convinced today, you carnal hearts

who have no desire to pray except when in affliction. Those hearts that are most spiritual are the ones that can pray most earnestly when God is coming most graciously to them. The time of affliction is the least likely time to receive anything from God, though I had intended to speak at greater length on that.

USE 2

If it is true that when God is in a way of mercy, one mercy will lead to another, then all the saints of God are taught and encouraged to observe and take diligent notice of the connection of God's mercies towards them. Certainly, this is God's way with His people—one mercy making way for another. If you belong to God, this has been His way with you all your life, even from the time He elected you.

It is now your duty to be observant of how God has made one mercy a door of hope to another mercy. It is a special work to observe God's ways toward a Christian, a special work of the Sabbath. Many of you, especially those not well-read, say you do not know how to spend the Sabbath once public worship is done, and so you walk up and down the streets. Here is a task for those who are not well-read: if you are godly, then each Sabbath, take some time to recall all the ways of God's merciful providence toward you since your youth and childhood, and how one mercy connected to another, how one mercy led to another, then a third, and that third led to a fourth.

You will see how God's goodness has been towards you throughout your life, and that will be a most delightful meditation, in which God will receive much glory. Psalm 92 is a psalm appointed for the Sabbath, and you will find that it is a psalm of contemplation on the works of God and the ways of God's mercies towards His people.

It is a special way to understand the connection of things and the causes, how one cause depends upon another and that upon another, and so on. This is the difference between sense and reason. The brute beasts that only have sense taste the sweetness of something but never inquire into the cause. However, the more rational a person is, the more they desire to understand the connection of causes.

If this is something that delights a soul in a natural way, to find out the connection of causes, then how sweet is it to a gracious soul to find out the connection and concatenation of all the mercies and goodness of the Lord toward them in all the events of their life!

Do this, especially because (Brethren), this which I am speaking of now is where a principal part of the glorious inheritance of the saints lies. The glory of Heaven, where the happiness of glorified souls shall reside, will be in this: that the eternal Sabbath spent in Heaven will, among other things, be spent in this work I am speaking of—in contemplating all the connections and concatenations of God's mercies toward those who are now in Heaven.

How they have been connected and concatenated ever since they came into existence, and how they were brought up to that height of glory. Oh, what an infinite satisfaction the saints shall have when God reveals everything to them! They shall see into the counsels and will of God so freely, and into all His ways, how they were chosen from all eternity and brought to eternity. There they shall see every act of providence that they did not understand before, how one event made way for another mercy, and that mercy for another, and so on until they were brought to that fullness of glory. They shall be eternally contemplating the connection of God's mercies, praising and blessing God, who worked and connected all things together for their good.

If you hope to come to Heaven and to be engaged in giving God glory there, then begin this work now, for we pray that God's will may be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

On the contrary, it will be a great part of the torment of the damned that they will see how one act of God's justice made way for another, how one instance of God's providence led to one judgment, and that to another, and so on until they were plunged into the bottomless pit forever. Just the very sight of how God worked from one to another will be torment enough for them.

Well, that is the second point: to consider the connection of God's mercies.

USE 3

If this is so, we are taught to receive every mercy of God kindly and to value all His mercies. If we belong to God, every mercy comes as a messenger of further mercy. Oh, receive it well, receive it kindly, embrace it, and make good use of it.

Indeed, when the prophet Elisha knew that the messenger of the king had come to harm him, he instructed them to treat him harshly at the door. But (Brethren) every mercy that comes to us, if we are godly, arrives as a messenger of good tidings, bringing more mercy with it. Therefore, let us welcome it kindly at the door; let us receive it warmly, for it will certainly lead to further mercy. That is the third point.

USE 4

The consideration of this point should lead to deep humility in our hearts and cause exceedingly sorrowful thoughts. If it is true that one

mercy from God makes way for another, and that a single mercy, when sanctified and blessed by God, becomes a door of hope for another, then when we look back at God's ways of mercy towards us and the opportunities we have had to obtain further mercy from God, it should move us to tears—perhaps even tears of blood.

Reflect upon your life. I suppose there is not one person in this congregation who, upon looking back at God's providence toward them, cannot say, "Oh, there was a time when the Lord was indeed merciful to me. Not only in outward mercies, such as the deliverances I experienced at various times—what might I have received had I followed those mercies? When I cried out to God for deliverance, He heard me. God delivered me, delivered my family, and now God, as it were, was in a way of mercy towards me. Oh, had I followed that then, what might I have gained? But I neglected the opportunity; I lost it, and now God is dealing with me differently."

But especially when you look back at the opportunities you have had for the good of your soul—hasn't God been in a way of mercy towards your soul many times? Oh, was there not a time when you began to feel the workings of God's Spirit within you? You began to have light shining into your conscience; you felt the Spirit of God drawing your heart. When you came to hear the Word, you found it coming with power, the Spirit of God sealing it, and your heart began to yield and melt before God. Oh, what might you have gained if you had continued, if you had followed God in those convictions of conscience and in those beginnings of troubles and workings of God's Spirit? What might you have become now? There was a door of hope, but we, foolish and wretched, failed to be born into new life.

Alas! Can many of us not say, "Oh, there was a door of hope. There was such a mercy of God towards me, but woe to me, for the door is

now shut. My heart is closed, my conscience is closed, and my heart is now hardened, though it was once beginning to soften. God was opening my heart, but now it is otherwise, and as far as I know, God has gone, and Christ has departed. I had a day, and if I had known it, oh, it would have been a blessed day for many in this place if they had followed God when He was in a way of mercy."

Perhaps when God was moving towards you in mercy, had you sought Him in your closet and cried out for Him to continue the good work He had begun and to make it effectual for you, it would have been a gracious work for your soul. But instead, you went off to your shop, your work, perhaps to the tavern or alehouse, to your games or your company, and so neglected the day of grace. There was a door of hope, but you chose another door rather than following God in the way of mercy.

I will not say there is no door of hope left for you, for there may still be one, but I will say this: your condition is lamentable and most grievous, and you urgently need to reflect upon it. This realisation often strikes the hearts of men and women later on, perhaps on their sickbed or deathbed. Then your conscience will preach to you what I am preaching now, and you will acknowledge, "It is true, there was a door of hope opened to me, but I shut it against myself."

Then, if any minister comes to offer mercy, you will say, "Yes, that mercy is for those who have a time of mercy, but God once opened my heart, and I shut it against Him." Such thoughts bring despair and are the sinking reflections of men and women on their sickbeds. If God had never come towards me, there might have been some hope, but now, what hope is there for me?

Oh, take heed for the future, all of you. If God is moving towards you in mercy, if today, by His Word, He begins to open any of your

hearts, strive to follow Him, to enter through this door of hope.

Well, that is the fourth point. Again, fifthly, from this point, we learn this...

USE 5

If one mercy is but an inlet to another mercy, then this should teach all the people of God to be content to bear one affliction, even if it merely paves the way for another affliction. The argument goes like this: it is true that one affliction comes, and soon after, another follows, and that one makes way for yet another, just as clouds rise after the rain. How many poor, weak hearts are plunged into despair! They can bear one affliction, yes, but when another comes, and yet another follows, eventually they collapse under the weight of their burdens.

But if you belong to God and have the assurance of this point that I have preached to you today, then use it as an argument to sustain your heart. It is true that one affliction comes after another, and one affliction makes way for the next. But have not mercies also followed one another? Have not mercies come thick and fast, one making way for the next? Surely, you have experienced many mercies, one leading to another. So, even though you now face new afflictions, remember how many times you have experienced mercies making way for more mercies.

USE 6

If this is God's way with His people—that one mercy leads to another—then it should be our way towards Him as well: that one duty should make way for another duty. There is great reason for this. If God is so gracious to us, that one mercy makes way for another, then

we ought to be so thankful to Him that one of our duties leads to another.

This, brethren, is an excellent thing—when one duty makes way for another. As I mentioned before, when a duty is considered a mercy, it will certainly endure. And so, take this second note of perseverance here: when one duty enables another, that soul will surely persevere in duty.

Here is the difference between what is done by the strength of a natural conscience and what is done from a principle of true sanctifying grace. I ask you to observe this. Many are troubled by this question of conscience. They say that someone who only acts from the strength of a natural conscience might perform a duty. How, then, can I know if I perform my duty from a gracious principle, from sanctifying grace, rather than merely from natural conscience?

If I were to give just one note and had to consider it deeply, I would offer this: If one duty that you perform equips you for another duty, enabling and preparing you for it, this is a sign that it is not merely out of a natural conscience. A natural conscience may prompt you to perform a duty, but it does not empower you to do it. However, a gracious principle prompts you to perform the duty and provides the strength to do it. Therefore, when you perform a duty out of conscience and find that one duty prepares you for another, this surely comes from a gracious principle. Not only does it equip you in the same manner—since, through habit, we become more proficient—but it prepares you in a different way. When one spiritual duty prepares you for another in a different kind or manner, this certainly comes from grace.

Therefore, if you understand this argument—that God's mercies make way for more mercies—then ensure that one of your duties

makes way for another. This is a certain sign that God's mercies will continue to flow into your soul.

USE 7

This point should serve as a rebuke to our unbelieving hearts. It is God's way that, when He bestows one mercy, we should see it as a door of hope for further mercies. However, our unbelieving hearts usually draw conclusions from God's mercies that nourish unbelief, entirely contrary to hope and faith. Instead of making God's mercies a door of hope to welcome more mercies, we often turn them into a door of unbelief that shuts out further mercies.

An unbelieving heart reasons like this: "Yes, they are mercies, but they will not last. These are mercies, but they are only preparing me for greater judgments." In this way, an unbelieving heart will use God's very mercies to create arguments of unbelief. This is a great sin, for God bestows mercies to raise hope and help your faith to flourish, not to strengthen your unbelief.

Yet, brethren, there are many Christians who make no other use of God's mercies than to feed and fortify their unbelief, when instead they should be using them as a door of hope.

An eighth use of this point should be...

USE 8

"Be ye merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful." Does one mercy from God make way for another? Let one good action (I mean an act of mercy to your brother) make way for another. Do not say, "I have done so much already, and therefore I may now indulge in my covetousness." No, if you have gracious principles, one act of mercy

must make way for another. One act of forgiveness towards your brother in one matter must lead to another. One act of generosity should pave the way for another. This is how God deals with you; do likewise with your brother, for this is the command: "Be ye merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful."

Now, the last use which I intended most of all, and which is the chief use of this point, is this:

USE 9

A use of exhortation to us all: to follow God in the way of His mercies. When God has opened a door of hope to us, let us follow on after God. In Psalm 63:8, the psalmist speaks of God to them, but notice how he applies it: "My soul," says he, "follows hard after God." O! This should be our course. Does God at any time come to us in a particular way of mercy? Let our souls follow hard after God.

When Jacob was wrestling with the Angel and day began to dawn, the Angel would have gone, but Jacob strove and wrestled all the more. What! Does the day dawn? Many times you are wrestling a long time with God, and there is still nothing but darkness in your soul, but through God's grace, you persevere. At length, the day begins to dawn, and God starts to let some light into your soul. And yet, even then, God may seem as though He would depart. O! Stir yourself up then and wrestle earnestly, for when the day begins to dawn, you should strive even harder.

As you know from the passage where God instructs David and his people, "When you hear the sound in the mulberry trees, bestir yourselves, for God is going out before you then." Likewise, I say, when you feel God stirring in your hearts and sense His impressions

upon your spirits, O! Bestir yourselves and follow on with the work of the Lord.

I recall that in the Gospel, a poor blind man cried out after Christ, "O Son of David, have mercy upon me!" Some tried to silence him, but eventually, Christ pitied him and asked who it was that cried after Him. Those nearby came to the blind man and said, "Be of good comfort, for He calls you." I have observed that he went as fast as he could then and feared no danger of stumbling.

So I say to many of your souls, it may be your case at this present: You have been crying for the sight of your eyes, "O! That He would show me His truth and open the Gospel and its mysteries! O! That He would open my heart and give me a soft heart and a believing heart, instead of my unbelieving heart!" Well, be of good comfort, for He calls you; now He works by His Spirit and calls you. O! Bestir yourself now, and pursue God in this way.

It is a special part of the wisdom and duty of Christians to observe the ways of God's mercy towards them, as I mentioned before: the connections of them, and especially the beginnings of them. Therefore, take this one note: Many Christians remain in darkness and under a spirit of bondage for a long time because they do not observe the beginnings of God's mercy—how God begins with them. Because they do not receive all the mercy they desire, they neglect to observe the initial signs of mercy. But if you had a heart to observe the beginnings of God's mercy and to pray when He begins to open the door and let in a little light, and thus follow God, you might have been free from the spirit of bondage long ago.

I must now leave particular applications and move to the more general ones. Since this is what our condition requires, we must seize this opportunity now. Though I may never do anything else, I could

not refrain at this time, for God has opened a door of mercy, a door of hope to us and to all of England. I believe everyone sees it, and among the people of God, it is the topic of their discourse when they come together.

Now, what should our concern be? O! That this door never be shut, that our iniquities may not lock it against us, but that we follow God in the way of His mercy. This, brethren, is a blessed door of hope, and I may compare this door of hope to that door which leads into the holy place in 1 Kings 7:50. The text says, "The hinges of gold for the doors of the inner house," that door that led into the holy place had hinges of gold.

Brethren, the worthies of our land, whom God has called to our Parliamentary Assembly, are the hinges of our door. And blessed be God, they are not iron hinges; they do not possess rigid and harsh spirits that disregard the cries of the oppressed. No, they have been unto us as hinges of gold, and our door of hope hangs upon hinges of gold.

If I were to speak to that Assembly, those who are the hinges of our door, the doorkeepers of this door of hope—yea, rather, those who are even this door itself unto us—were I to speak to them, I would seek to impress upon them the great charge of the mighty trust that has been committed to them. Never has any assembly in the world had such opportunities for greater mercy from God for His people than these have.

Were I to speak to them, I would seek to persuade them that, as they would have God open His door to their souls, both for themselves and their posterity, when they knock at God's door of mercy, they would be faithful in keeping the door of hope open to us, that we might enter comfortably. I would urge them to open their own

hearts, "Open, ye gates, and be ye opened, ye everlasting doors, that Christ the King of Glory may enter into your hearts and families, and be set up there."

However, since I am not to speak to them but to you today, I shall direct myself to you in that which is suitable to this audience to whom I am preaching.

The exhortation from God to you is this: Take notice of the great work of God in this door of hope, give Him the glory, and praise His name for His wondrous works. Declare that His name is near, and therefore praise Him. Seek God earnestly now, when He is in a way of mercy. O! That you would seek to praise Him now, and praise Him as much as you can. That you would align yourself with God in the great work that He is about, that, according to your various places and ranks, you would further the great work that God has opened a door to, that you would be active while God is moving in a way of mercy.

Let your hearts be up and remain lifted as God's heart is up at this time, and may they stay that way forever. To that end, that your hearts may be stirred to further the work of God and to keep this door open, consider these reflections.

1.

That door of hope we now have—oh, it is a door that God has opened after much knocking. Oh, there has been such rapping at Heaven's gate, mighty knockings there before this door was opened. Oh, the prayers of the saints that have been offered up to open this door! They have knocked again and again, and it seemed to be barred against them. At length, prayer has opened the door, as God

promised, "Knock, and it shall be opened." This day, that word is fulfilled for us: we have knocked, and the door is opened. Now, that door which has been opened by such knockings—oh, what a great pity it would be if it were shut again through our remissness.

2.

It is a door of hope opened to us now when, but a little while ago, we had a door of fears, miseries, wrath, wickedness, superstition, and idolatry set wide open. This was the door not long ago. Oh, did not God open a door to us in such a way as if He would let in all wrath and miseries? What fears did we have? What kind of communion did we have when we met together? "What shall we do? Where shall we go? The hand of God is against us." You were afraid that God would let in a deluge of misery, and through that door, let all His wrath fall upon us. Not only that, but there was a door open for all kinds of wickedness, superstition, idolatry, and cruelty. What a door was there open not long ago! We may apply that passage from Jeremiah 23:15, where the prophet says, "Profaneness is gone throughout the whole land from the prophets," from wicked and scandalous ministers and others. Oh, what superstition and profaneness spread through our land! There was a door open for all wickedness, a door that could bring every kind of iniquity.

Now, that we who had the mouth of such a door opened upon us should now have a door of hope opened to us—oh, praised and blessed be the name of God! Shall we be unfaithful now to God in this way of mercy towards us?

3.

Consider that we have this door of hope opened to us after we have been unfaithful, after the opening of other doors. How many doors have we shut on ourselves in the past? We have had many doors of hope—other parliaments before—and yet, by not following God, we wickedly and wretchedly shut these doors upon God and upon ourselves. And yet, that God should open yet another door to us—oh, gracious God! As they cried at the laying of the foundation of the temple, "Praise, praise," so we may say now, even though the work is not done as we desire, yet at the beginning of it, we may cry, "Praise, praise."

4.

This door of hope was opened to us when, in our own thoughts, we had given all up for lost, when we even thought that God had shut the door against us for eternity. Oh, how have the ministers of God in former times been proclaiming judgments, and our guilty consciences agreed with those truths, saying, "Surely now God is gone, peace is gone, Christ is gone, hope in God for posterity is even gone. We are made a prey to their teeth and are even swallowed up." And now, after we gave up all as lost, and concluded that God had shut the door against us forever, for God to open a door of hope—this should work upon our consciences to sanctify the Lord's name and to follow the Lord with all our might in this way of mercy.

5.

Consider with what a mighty hand this door of hope was opened to you. I remember reading in Josephus concerning the destruction of the Temple. He says that, shortly before the Temple was destroyed, the Temple door—so large that it required the service of thirty men

every morning to open it and every night to shut it—flew open on its own accord. They saw this as a mighty ominous sign, as the hand of God. Surely, this door of hope could not have been opened by all the skill and power of men; they could not have conceived the way. God came by His immediate hand and opened it. A mighty hand, an outstretched arm of God, has taken away the bars and opened this door of hope. Now, to abuse it, or not to thank the name of God for this act where His hand has been so remarkably shown—oh! this is a grievous sin and a mighty provocation of God, since this is the door that God's mighty hand has opened.

6.

It is a door that many adversaries have laboured long to shut. Oh, what devices, counsels, and plots—every possible way that could be devised to shut this door—but God has kept it open and placed a bar to keep it open, despite our adversaries. We may say of this, as St Paul did in another case when speaking of a different door in 1 Corinthians 16:9: "There was an effectual door opened, and there were many adversaries." So we may say that here is a door opened, and many adversaries there are.

7.

This door—oh! it is a door of mercy through mercy, and therefore be thankful. (I say) it is a door of mercy through mercy. Brethren, had God opened a door of hope, even if it had been the valley of Achor in the other sense—the valley of trouble—if God had brought upon England the greatest of troubles and confusion, yet if He had made this a door of hope to bring in mercy, we would have infinite cause for thankfulness. But such is His goodness that we have a door of

hope, of mercy by mercy. We may say of this door, as the Scripture says of that door in 1 Kings 6:31: "And for the entrance of the oracle, he made doors of olive wood." Two doors were also made of olive wood, and the olive, you know, is a symbol of peace. Our door of hope is made of olive wood. Oh, we might have had iron doors and gates that would tear our flesh; we might have had to pass through fire and water to come at mercy. But, beloved, we have a door of olive wood, a door of abundant mercies. Yes, such a door at the entrance of which we find abundant mercies. At the very threshold of the door—oh! what mercies have already been found! (I say) in the early endeavours of those who have been our doorkeepers, or rather, our doors of hope, what abundance of mercies have already been found!

Thus, I may say of the endeavours of those now assembled in Parliament, as it is said in the Book of Canticles concerning the Church's endeavours during the time of reformation (which many understand that passage to refer to), in Canticles 5:5: "I rose up to open to my beloved," and what then? "And my hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock." What is the meaning of this? The Church of God, when Christ had called by His Spirit, and after being stirred by His grace, began to endeavour reformation. In the very first efforts at reformation, when they were just entering upon the door of reformation—oh! it was very sweet in the nostrils of God, very savoury. "My hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh upon the handles of the lock." When I was just endeavouring to open and reform, my efforts were very savoury to the nostrils of Christ. So, too, the very fingers of our worthies—do they not smell of sweet myrrh? Are they not savoury in the nostrils of God and in the nostrils of His saints? They are savoury even when their hands are just upon the handles of the lock. Therefore, seeing

that we have such a precious door as this, we are bound to seek God for its opening and to pray for it to remain open. But yet further...

Considering, brethren, the wideness and the vastness of it, everyone who is acquainted with how the constellation of events is unfolding in Germany, France, Spain, the Low Countries, and elsewhere can see that God is, as it were, working together to make this door of our hope wider and wider, to expand our opportunities. God, in this, bids us to come and ask what we will, and we shall have it—a door so wide that our forefathers never knew. Oh! How they would have rejoiced to see this wide door of hope opened! How unthankful and unworthy wretches we would be if we were to neglect such a wide door of hope as this! Nay,

Consider not only, brethren, the wideness of this door but also the treasures into which this door opens. To what does this door open? If it opens to something that holds no great treasure, then there would be no need for much striving to enter. But if it opens to rich and invaluable treasures, then there is indeed a need for striving to enter. Surely, brethren, this door of our hope opens into invaluable and glorious treasures. What treasures? The liberty of our estates is a great favour; deliverance from the oppression of wicked and unreasonable men is a great favour. Oh! Much more is our liberty of conscience. Is our liberty of conscience oppressed? That is the oppression that cries in God's ears. The oppression of the poor, the oppression of bread, that cries out; but when the children of God cry to their Father, "Father, these proud prelatical men are those who take away our bread," God has heard their cry and has now opened a door to deliver us from the oppression of conscience and to grant us bread again. Not only that, but it opens to this treasure too—it opens to the treasure of the purity of God's ordinances and the deliverance of us from those burdens.

If I were to mention but this one burden upon the ministers of God, it would be enough. Yet, it is not only upon their shoulders but also upon the consciences of men, and that is the admitting of so many profane, wretched creatures to the sacrament. It is an insupportable burden to any conscientious man who has to partake in such a matter. For those who are opposed to God, in their profanity, for us to come and tell them, "Here, take the body of Jesus Christ that was given for you"—no conscientious person is not oppressed by this. And not only this, but it burdens you also. For certainly, brethren, there should be an excluding of such from these holy things. And to whom has God committed the trust of this great ordinance? Certainly, He has committed the trust to the Church; wherever there is a true Church, there this trust is committed. If you would own yourselves as a true Church, surely, you are entrusted with it.

But you may say, "We have no power to do it." Do not plead so, for you have a power. Christ has given a power to every Church to do it, to purge out the old leaven. Therefore, know that when nothing stands between your power and the exercise of it but only suffering and affliction, your power is no power if you do not exercise that power which Christ has given you. The sin will lie upon you, and suffering is no excuse for failing to exercise your power. Now, if God opens a door in this way, and we see some light to deliver our consciences from snares and from these burdens, oh! It is a blessing and mercy; it creates a door to open to all of God's mercies. This is the reason many separate from your congregations—not because they judge your Church to be a false Church or your ministry to be a false ministry, but...

1. Because they do not have all the ordinances of God in their purity, there are such corruptions that they cannot engage with all.

2. They cannot fully enjoy all of God's ordinances. Though the Church be true, and the Ministry be true, yet certainly those who are conscientious and consider them cannot help but be fearful. Therefore, if there is a door of hope to welcome in our brethren —the outcasts of Israel—and to join with them in communion, certainly every gracious heart cannot help but see this as a precious mercy, that God should open the door of hope. This should be your prayer and endeavour to the utmost of your ability: that this door of hope may be so wide that your brethren may come and enter in with the peace of their consciences. As it has been England's honour in the past that others have come from other countries for their conscience's sake and found shelter here, let it not now be England's dishonour that her own children should be driven out because they cannot have liberty of conscience, even in matters that some consider to be of indifferent nature. If, I say, England should now be dishonoured by casting out and disregarding her brethren because they cannot find peace of conscience, oh, what a dishonour it will be if it continues! Therefore, if God is opening this door, it ought to be your endeavour to seek God and to strive that it may be so wide that those whom you, in your consciences, judge to be faithful and godly, may come in and enjoy peaceable communion with you.

3. This door may further the setting up of Christ in His Kingdom of Glory. Christ has been set up greatly in England in His prophetical, kingly, and priestly office. Now that Christ may be set up in the Church to rule upon His throne and have a door of hope opened to that, this will have an influence on the general reformation of all Christian Churches in the world, for the overthrowing of the Kingdom of Antichrist. Such a door of hope has been opened to us. Yes, and further still,

4. Consider what a dreadful thing it would be if this door of hope should be shut. Though it is true that we have some comforting evidence that it shall not (as I shall speak on shortly), yet who knows but that through our own wretchedness and lack of preparation in the hearts of the people of this land, this door might be shut again? Oh, the dismal darkness if it were ever to be shut again! Oh, the contempt that would fall upon all the Saints of God! Oh, the pride, rage, and insolence of the instruments of Antichrist against them if this door were shut again! Then, if we should once again say, "We looked for light, but behold, darkness," oh, it would be blackness of darkness indeed! What flies would come out of the land of Egypt then? How would all superstition and idolatry flood in upon us? What would become of your posterity and little ones? How would they ever be nurtured in the knowledge of God and Christ? And you would not likely even enjoy your outward estates either. If any of you think you have back doors to escape from religion to keep your estates, you may be mistaken if this door is shut. Therefore, you have every need to follow God with all you can in this way to keep it open.

5. Had we hearts to be faithful with God, though it is not much that we can do, there is nevertheless a promise that God made to the Church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7. "To the angel of the Church of Philadelphia write: These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth: I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." Surely, these were an excellent people. And mark what follows: "For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but

> do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." God opens a door and says that no man shall shut this door.

Truly, brethren, it is very observable that we have this from that famous instrument of God who brought much light unto this book—namely, Mr. Brightman, whom I mention for honour's sake. Those of you familiar with his writings upon this book shall find that he applies every one of these Churches to the Churches that should follow after, even to the end of the world, and makes it not only literal but also typical, to typify God's ways of dealing with other Churches to the end of the world. It is very notable that he made the Church of Sardis correspond with the Church of Germany, exactly according to his explanation of God's dealings with the Church of Sardis. He prophesied what God would do to the Church of Germany, and so it came to pass.

And this Church of Philadelphia, he interpreted it thirty or forty years ago (so long ago it is since he wrote it) as the Church of Scotland, and see how far God has made it good. God has opened a door to them, and certainly such a door as shall never be shut. That which has been opened to them, and they will not only have it themselves, but God will make them instrumental for others. And mark how they are described: "Thou hast a little strength." Everyone looked upon that Church with contempt, as a very poor, beggarly nation, an ignorant people, having little knowledge of anything at all, and but little time. Yet, "Thou hast kept my word." Though they have little knowledge, they will keep His word.

Yes, mark and consider how far he goes on: "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and say they are the Church of God—I will make them to say they are not Jews,

they are not the Church of God, but they do lie. Behold, I will make them come and worship before this people, and to know that I am God, even to worship before their feet, and to know that I have loved them." Do not those who once cried out against them and railed upon them now begin to be convinced that God was with them? And so now, we know how they are called by others, and what titles they now have, different from before. Thus God has fulfilled it in part upon them, and believe it, we shall share in that mercy—even that door that is opened to us in this way is so opened that it shall not be shut again. Wherefore, to conclude all…

1. Let everyone take heed, and let the fear of God be upon every soul, especially those of you who are more eminent than others in any position. Take heed, as from God this day, take warning that you do not become the least interruption in the great work that God is undertaking. Certainly, if you do, if you stand in this doorway to hinder the good that God is letting in, you will undoubtedly be overcome; you will certainly be vanquished. You can never hinder the work that God is about, and therefore, those men who are superstitious, Antichristian, and would uphold such a work, I say, those men are, in some respects, more unfortunate than the superstitious and Antichristian men of former times. This is because those who sought to maintain superstition and popery before did so at a time when God was patient and long-suffering towards the enemies of His people and permitted it to come in (not by way of approval, but by way of permission). But now is the very time that God is rooting it out; now is the time that God is setting Himself against it. Therefore, those who now seek to uphold it are the most unfortunate of men, for they stand in the doorway just as God comes with His power and strength. Oh, take heed that you have no hand in interrupting the great work that God is undertaking.

And, my brethren, that we may give God the honour of this door of hope,

2. Let us consider for ourselves what we would have given in times past to have had such a door of hope. I am persuaded that many of us would have laid down our lives. "Oh Lord, if we might have purchased as much good as now has come to England, we would have counted our dearest heart's blood well spent." Now, seeing that we would have given so much before, oh, what shall we render now? That strength which we would have spent under the cruel rage of our adversaries, oh, let that strength now be spent in the praise and honour of our God under His mercies. There is a notable place of scripture for this in Psalm 119:134. God had delivered him from his oppressors, and therefore he would keep His statutes: "You have, O Lord, delivered me from my oppressors, therefore I will keep Your statutes." So, the strength that we would have spent under the cruelty of our oppressors should now be spent in keeping God's statutes and following His ways.

3. Let our hopes now rise higher. God would have our hopes raised higher, and seeing that He has opened a door, let us stand in the doorway. Let us not be discouraged, even though we might think perfect reformation a difficult thing. Yet, brethren, perfect reformation now is not more difficult than that which we have now, and which seemed difficult a year or two ago. A year or two ago, that which we have now was as unlikely as perfect reformation seems to be now. Therefore, we ought to raise our hopes to greater things. In the account of the king who struck the ground twice or thrice, he should have struck seven or eight times. And, brethren, we have to do with a great God whose design is to magnify His great name in the good of His Church.

> In Psalm 17, it says, "You have shown your marvellous loving-kindness." The word, as taken by some, may be read, "Lord, make Your loving-kindness wonderful, miraculous." God loves to make His loving-kindness to His Church miraculous. Now, brethren, we may hope to receive from God that which shall make God appear as a wonder-working God, that shall set up God in His glory. This reformation in our land shall set up God in His glory, which we hope for. Our hope is at its lowest unless we hope for such great things as may reveal God to be an infinite and great God. An ordinary reformation, or deliverance from the oppression of the state, is not enough to reveal the infinite pardoning and loving-kindness of God. Therefore, in conclusion, let everyone now go on in the name of God, stand in the doorway, observe how God is coming, and align with Him, meeting God in every way of His mercy.

In Revelation 4:1, the text says, "There was a door opened in heaven." Brethren, certainly there is a door opened in heaven. Let us encourage our hearts and do what we can in our places, and with the strength that we have, let us open our hearts and desires to Him. Let Him know that we are willing to risk our estates, our liberties, our lives, and all that we have to maintain a good cause. God has done much, and He will do much. In Psalms, He says, "I have brought you out of the land of Egypt, open your mouth wide that I may fill it. I have done great things, brought you out of the land of Egypt, open your mouth wide that I may fill it." Certainly, God has delivered us from the Egyptian bondage; let us open our mouths, our hearts, our arms, and our hands wide, and the Lord will fill them.

And now, may the Lord grant to each one of you, as He did to Lydia, the text says, "The Lord opened her heart." And so, may the Lord open your hearts. And as you read, there was an effectual door of

faith opened to the Gentiles, so let this be the conclusion of all: I pray that, at last, there may be a door of faith opened to this congregation, to receive these truths that have been delivered by faith.

OLD AGE IS A Crown of Glory, Especially When Found in Ways OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Preached before the Company of Mercers at their Chapel. May 20, 1641.

Proverbs 16:31
"The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness."

I have lately preached in this city to young men, and at this time, supposing this audience to be intended chiefly for grave citizens (though others may be present), I have prepared to speak suitably unto them. In Psalm 148:12, both young men and old men are called to praise the name of the Lord. As it was a blessed time when the children cried "Hosanna" upon Christ's coming to purge the Temple (for that was the occasion), so it shall be, and is, a blessed time when old men come to God in the praise of His great works, when God shall reign gloriously before the elders of Israel.

We have such a prophecy in Isaiah 24:23, "When the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, before His elders gloriously." A blessed time it will be when the elders behold the

glorious reign of Christ and are joyful in it. And again, in Revelation 4, it is prophesied of the Elders (at the end of the chapter) that they fell down and worshipped Him that lives forever, casting down their crowns before Him.

This text of mine is a proverbial sentence, setting out the glory of old men in the ways of righteousness. We may spare the dependence, for proverbs are not like jewels linked together in a bracelet but are as many separate diamonds lying one by another, some of them, as it were, in a box together. Now, this proverb has in it two diamonds set upon the crown of old men—one below it, and the other atop it. The one below it is the "hoary head," and atop it is "found in the way of righteousness." The hoary head is a crown to old men, if it be found in the way of righteousness.

There are two doctrinal points we have in these words. The first is...

Doctrine 1: That Old Age is an honourable thing; it is a Crown of Glory.
Doctrine 2: But it is especially honourable when it is found in the way of righteousness.

For it is not wholly limited to the way of righteousness—the word [IF] is not in the original. It is honourable regardless, but then most honourable when found in the way of righteousness.

I shall first address the first Doctrine.

It is a high expression of the Holy Spirit here: *The hoary head is glory, and it is a crown of glory*. *Corona ornatissima* (a most glorious crown), saith one interpreter; *a crown of exaltation*, says another; *corona pulchritudinis*, a crown of beauty, says another. The

hoary head is a glorious crown, a crown of exaltation, a crown of beauty.

1. God honours Old Age by speaking honourably of it, as in Proverbs 20:29, "Gray hairs are the beauty of old men."

2. God honours it by promising Old Age to those who keep His commandments, as in Deuteronomy 4:40. And you know the first commandment with a promise—the fifth commandment: "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

3. God honours it by preferring it before all riches and all other kinds of honours. In Proverbs 3:16, it is said that in the right hand of wisdom is length of days, and in her left hand are riches and honour. Riches and honour are but in the left hand of wisdom, while length of days is in the right hand. Thus, God honours Old Age.

4. God honours it by giving a charge to others to honour it. In Leviticus 19:32, "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the Lord." It is one of the most solemn charges we have in the Scripture. Mark with what gravity and solemnity the charge is given: "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the Lord." Your fear of God is laid upon this.

And because I see many young ones here, I shall direct my speech to you, especially those of you who make any profession of religion. You must manifest it in this: Would you make it appear that you fear the Lord? "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear the Lord." This is one aspect of fearing God:

to do this in obedience to Him. And if you are bold and disrespectful before the aged, know that this is evidence that the fear of God is not upon you.

The beauty and glory of religion are to be shown in the duties of our relationships: between father and child, servant and master, inferior and superior, young and old. Unless religion manifests itself in our relationships, it is all in vain. "Thou shalt honour the face of the old man, and fear the Lord." God places the fear of His name upon this, and this is a great honour that God bestows upon Old Age.

Secondly, it is honoured by all good men. In Job 32:5-6, Elihu honours the aged in various verses, and when Paul wrote to Philemon, in verse 9 of that epistle, he presents it as an argument, referring to himself as "Paul the aged," knowing it was indeed a powerful appeal to Philemon.

Thirdly, Old Age is honoured even by the heathen themselves. I remember reading about the Lacedaemonians: when their ambassadors were at Athens, they were once in a theatre where a great crowd had gathered. A grave, elderly man entered, and immediately, the Lacedaemonian ambassadors, out of reverence for the aged man, rose to make room for him. Upon seeing this, all the Athenians gave a great shout, applauding their act of respect, noting that they, being strangers, would show such reverence to age. This is a good rule, not just when they come into theatres, but also into places of God’s assemblies. When aged men come, not to theatres to see plays, but to worship God and hear His word, young men should rise up before them and show respect to their age. Know that I do not speak of this merely as a moral act, but as a demonstration of the fear of God.

Fourthly, it has been considered in Scripture as a sign of great humanity when the aged are honoured. In Deuteronomy 28:50, there is a notable passage where God threatens to send "a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old." It is described as an inhumane nation for this lack of regard.

Fifthly, when God would threaten judgment against a family, He threatens that there shall be no old man in it, as seen in 1 Samuel 2:31-32.

Question: But why should Old Age be so honoured?

I do not have time to explore fully all the reasons (as there are other matters I intend to address), but I shall provide a few points.

Answer 1: They possessed the world before you, and they have been the means to maintain the world, acting as instruments to keep it in the order and good condition in which it exists.

2. They are presumed to have knowledge, prudence, and understanding, as Old Age is often linked with wisdom in Scripture. I remember the Chaldee paraphrase on the passage "thou shalt rise up before the old man," which translates it as *qui doctus est in Lege*, "before him who is taught in the law," supposing that all old men should be men of understanding and knowledge. Indeed, an ignorant old man in these times of knowledge is a monster in the world, having lived through such an age of light that has shone so clearly, dazzling our very eyes and continually sparking within our consciences.

3. Old Age is something that all desire to reach, and therefore, it is honourable.

4. There is a kind of image of God's eternity upon it, for God Himself holds the title of "the Ancient of Days."

USE 1.

If God thus honours old age and bestows such honour upon it, O! let us all honour it likewise. Let there be a reverent demeanour from you towards them; let them see the work of godliness, the fruit of godliness, especially in governors towards their servants, and parents towards their children, so that they may perceive that since they became more godly, they have shown greater reverence for old age. Seek advice from them and be willing to be guided by them, yet do not give so much regard to age that you allow it to lead you into error.

When antiquity is cited for that which is not truth, it becomes but the very mould of error. Many, when they are entrenched in their error and cannot find their way out—especially in disputes—will attempt to defend themselves with claims of antiquity. Just as we read of Jeremiah, when he was put into the mire, they used old, rotten rags under his armholes to lift him out; so many, when mired in disputes and with nothing else to say, will attempt to gather together the old rotten rags of antiquity. Yet true antiquity is that which aligns with the original source of all antiquity. *"Meus Jesus Christus,"* said Ignatius, and Chrysostom added, *"Christ said not that 'I am custom,' but that 'I am the truth.'"*

There is indeed great influence in old age, capable of prevailing upon the younger, sometimes even in matters that are not right. In this sense, the Holy Ghost instructs us to "call no man father" in such a way that grants him authority to dictate our actions against the truth. We have a notable story in 1 Kings 13:11, of the prophet whom God commanded not to return the same way he came, nor to stay or eat in

that place when he arrived at the court. When he came to the court, they tried to persuade him to return, to stay and eat, but he easily dismissed the group of young courtiers. However, when he met the old prophet—"Now there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel," says the text—this old prophet persuaded him to go against God's command. It seems he had some reverential respect for his age, and so he prevailed, where the younger courtiers could not.

We must be careful that antiquity does not lead us into error, not even by an old prophet. Yet, even so, we must maintain our reverence towards them. Especially you who are children, show respect to your elderly parents. In Proverbs 23:22, there is a charge: *"Hearken to thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old."* Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother simply because she is older, for mothers, being weaker, are more easily despised. Therefore, God gives a specific command that no one should despise their mothers when they are old.

2. Show respect to them by being dutifully obedient and heeding their counsel. Even Esau, who was so wicked, still sought to show respect to his aged father, Isaac. As in Genesis 28:8-9, when Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please Isaac his father, he then went to Ishmael and took Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, as a wife, in addition to the wives he already had. When Esau realised that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father, he chose someone whom he believed would be more agreeable to the mind of his old father. Even a profane Esau would not displease his aged father, especially in such an important matter as his choice of wife.

3. Show respect to your parents by bearing good will towards them. The very reason why many desire to be rid of their aged parents, or to be apart from them, is in fact an argument (if rightly considered) why they should desire to have them near instead. Since they have many weaknesses, you should desire to have your parents with you, so that you may cover their weaknesses and bear with them. Who is more suited to do this than you, their child? Even the stork will teach you to care for your aged parents, helping them to fly and feeding them when they are no longer able to do so themselves.

4. It is a great evil in a commonwealth, and a sign of great confusion, when the young behave proudly against the old. In Isaiah 3:5, when the young rise up and act arrogantly towards the old, it is noted as a significant indication of God's judgment upon a kingdom. Indeed, it is a sad and grievous disorder. We love the houses and towns in which we were born; how much more should we love the loins and the womb in which we were born, to which we should give even greater respect?

5. God threatens those who are disobedient and defiant towards their parents, stating that the very ravens shall pick out their eyes. Under the law, they were to be punished with death. If any parent came and charged their son with disobedience, that son was to be stoned to death.

USE 2.

You who are old and advanced in years, seeing that God has bestowed honour upon you, take care that you do not dishonour your grey hairs. God says that you are a crown of glory; do not dishonour this crown of glory. Your white hairs will only make your sins appear darker by contrast. We read in Numbers 6:7 that the high priest was

not permitted to defile himself because the consecration of God was upon his head. There is a crown of glory upon your head; therefore, do not defile yourself.

I have read of a Spartan (Lacedaemonian) who wore his beard very long, and it was white. When someone asked him why he wore it so long, he answered, "I wear it long so that, seeing my white hairs, I may do nothing dishonourable to them, nothing unbefitting of these white hairs of mine." If you do anything that is unbefitting of your hoary head and crown of glory, you take away its beauty. There is a *puerilis senectus*—an old man may be as a child, just as a young man may be old. A young man can be old in spirit, demeanour, and conduct, while much vanity can make the old behave like children.

In Titus 2:2-3, we find the exhortation of the Holy Spirit to older men, instructing them to carry themselves with dignity and modesty. It is noteworthy that although Rehoboam was over forty years old, the scripture (as found in 2 Chronicles 13:7) calls him a child. He was but a child—someone with a very childish, effeminate heart. When Rehoboam was young and tender-hearted, he could not stand firm. "Young," "a child," "tender-hearted," all indicate a foolish, effeminate, and childish spirit, yet this Rehoboam was over forty years old. In contrast, Joseph, a young man, is referred to in Genesis 45 as a "father to Pharaoh."

USE 3.

If it is an honour to live many years in this world, O! What honour, then, is eternity—to live forever? It has been considered a great honour to have any monument of a person last for a considerable time after they have died. Julius Caesar, for example, is said to have had his ashes kept in an urn in a room to this day, such is the esteem for a monument. But to live eternally with God—what honour is in

that? If the hoary head is a crown of glory, what greater crown of glory is there than to possess eternal life, to have that eternal crown placed upon you? What are a few years here in this world compared to eternity? They are but a drop of water compared to the infinite ocean. If you have reason to bless God for a few years that He has granted you here, how much more should you bless Him for the hope of eternal life?

USE 4.

If the hoary head is such a crown of glory, if it confers honour upon men, what, then, does eternity itself confer upon God? If men are to be honoured for having lived a few years in this world, how much more should God be honoured, who is eternal? God takes glory in His eternity, declaring, "I am He that inhabiteth eternity." The elders in Revelation 4:8 fell down and worshipped Him who "was, and is, and shall be forevermore."

I recall that Pareus speaks of a custom of the Turks: every morning, they have someone proclaim aloud, "The Lord that was, and that shall be forever, the Lord is eternal; He has no beginning." Though you may have lived many years, you are but of yesterday, while the Lord shall have no end. In a short time, it will be said of you, "He lived for seventy or eighty years and then died," as it is in Genesis 5, where Methuselah, Adam, and others are recorded: "He lived so many years, and he died."

I have read of one who, upon hearing that chapter read—"such a one lived so many hundred years and then died"—was so deeply moved that it caused him to forsake all worldly things and focus on preparing for his eternal estate, leading to his conversion. It must one day be said of you, "He was seventy or eighty years old, and he died," but God remains forever. We are but as grass. Therefore, if

God commands that honour be given to you because of your age, you must also honour God for His eternity.

God cannot have any time added to Him; there is no succession of time with Him. God cannot be said to have lived longer now than before the world began; there is no addition of time to Him, for He is beyond all measure of time. When we experience any measure of time, or any continuance of comfort, it is good for us to worship the eternal God, finding our hearts delighting in Him who transcends all time.

There is a particularly noteworthy passage in Genesis concerning Abraham, in Genesis 21. After Abraham had been moving about for a time, he finally found a resting place. The text says, "Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba," which suggests he was to remain there. And what did he do next? "He called there upon the name of the Lord, the everlasting God." This is the first time God is called "the everlasting God" in Scripture, and Abraham invoked this name when he was granted some stability in that place where he could plant a grove.

Has God granted you stability, allowing you to live for a long time in this city in a prosperous condition? Then learn to call upon the name of God, the everlasting God, and give honour to the eternal God.

But we must now pass from this first point, though it is a matter of great importance, to the second, which is the principal point:

The hoary head is a crown of glory—but when? When it is found in the way of righteousness. That is the second point.

Doctrine 2: That it is the way of righteousness that truly places the crown of glory upon the hoary head.

That is the diamond atop the crown. If the grey head is an honour, then righteousness is the honour of that honour; if it is a crown, righteousness is the crown of that crown. *Mensura vitae non est longitudo sed honestum*—the measure of life is not its length but its godliness, which is the great honour by which we are to measure our lives.

You may have heard the saying of the one who remarked, "I have been long, but I have not lived long." Old men, unless they are righteous, have been long, but they can scarcely be said to have lived long.

“If it be found in the way of righteousness,” that is, supposing that you have been godly from your youth and have continued in godliness as you age, then that is true honour. For although it is good for people to begin walking in the ways of godliness at any point in their lives—and it is never too late to start—being an *Elementarius Senex* (a beginner in old age) is rather a dishonour. It is a dishonour (I mean) if you only start then; surely the text means this: If it is found—that is, if you have continued in the course of your life in righteousness, and so your old age does not mark the beginning of righteousness in you but finds you already walking in the way of righteousness—then it brings honour.

It is spoken to the honour of the disciple Mnason in Acts 21:16: "There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge." An old disciple—it is a mark of honour unto him that he was an old disciple. Likewise, Obadiah says in 1 Kings 18:12, "I have feared God from my youth," and the Holy Spirit records this as a great honour to him.

If any of you, as Obadiah, who was advanced in years, can say, “The Lord has now granted me length of days, and I bless His name that (though in weakness, yet) I have feared God from my youth,” oh, that is truly honourable!

As it is reported of Polycarp, when he was about to die as a martyr, they tried to make him renounce the truth. “Oh,” said he, “these eighty-six years I have served Christ and found Him a good Master. Shall I forsake Him now?” What an honourable statement that was—to be able to say, “These eighty-six years have I served Christ and found Him a good Master.” Can you, perhaps, say, “For sixty, seventy, or even forty years, I have served Christ and found Him a good Master”? If you can, then that is truly honourable if you are found in the way of righteousness.

1. This is a great evidence of the deep rooting of your grace, which confers even greater honour upon you. It indicates that grace has taken a very deep root, given that it has sustained and flourished in you all this while. You know the seed that was sown on the stony ground—it sprang up for a moment but soon withered away. But that which was sown on good ground came up and flourished, even under the heat of the sun.

Many people have a good beginning. Even Nero, though he became an abominable wretch later, had a notable five years of being quite zealous in godliness but eventually fell away. If, however, you continue and persevere until you are aged, it is a blessed sign of the deep root of grace in your heart. That is the first point.

2. Those who are old in the ways of righteousness must surely be assumed to be very eminent in grace and godliness. They have acquired much in the ways of godliness and have grown to some measure of excellence in holy ways. John began young and

continued into old age in godliness. Indeed, he was nearly one hundred years old, for his banishment occurred during the time of Domitian, which was eighty years after Christ. When he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos, he was not less than over a hundred years old, and at that age, he received divine revelations.

Those who have continued long in godliness grow to a great eminence in godliness. Obadiah (as some believe) was the prophet Obadiah, who had continued long in the ways of godliness. Grace does not follow the same pattern as nature. While nature comes to a peak and then declines, grace continues to grow and flourish. Though the body may weaken, grace will continue to thrive.

It is the promise of God in Psalm 92:14: "Those that are planted in the house of God shall flourish in the courts of God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and flourishing." That is the promise of God. Therefore, it stands to reason that there is great eminence in such people, and they are to be honoured, wearing a crown of glory.

And thirdly...

3. Those who have continued long in the ways of righteousness have had many experiences of God—wonderful experiences of His ways, His faithfulness, His mercies, and His truth in the course of His providence towards His Churches. This is an honourable thing. David, in Psalm 25:6, speaks of God's mercies of old; and in Psalm 74:12, he says, "He was a King of old"; and in Psalm 44, at the beginning, "Our fathers have told us the things of old that Thou hast done." In Psalm 119:152, he states, "I have known Thy testimonies of old."

To have experienced God's will and ways in the passages of His providence from times past is a glorious thing. Those who are old in the ways of righteousness come to know exceedingly much of God's mind in that regard, and this is a crown of glory.

4. Those who are old in the ways of righteousness give a good testimony to the truth that the ways of righteousness are indeed good. An old servant who remains with his master gives a positive testimony of the master's goodness. Similarly, the bee that stays long at a flower and does not leave gives testimony that there is much sweetness to be gathered there. As apostates who fall away from God's service bring dishonour and imply, as much as in them lies, that there isn't as much goodness in God's service as others claim, those who have remained steadfast, like Polycarp who could say, "I have found Him a good Master all this while," bring honour to God's ways.

5. It is honourable because there are so few who continue in the ways of godliness until they are old. If we plant many seeds and most of them fail, but one or two flourish and grow into strong trees, we value and delight in them more. In the same way, because God sees that there are so few who continue in His ways, those who do are more prized and honoured by Him.

Paul tells us that many forsook him, as recorded in 2 Timothy 1:15-16, where he prays for the house of Onesiphorus because he remained with Paul when most in Asia had abandoned him. This is honourable.

Furthermore,

Those who continue in the ways of godliness are honourable before the Lord because they have passed through many difficulties in the

ways of God. A soldier who has endured many dangers and difficulties in the King's service is all the more honoured.

We read of Solomon in 1 Kings 2:26, where he honoured Abiathar because he had endured much affliction with his father in the past. Likewise, God will honour those who have faced many trials and changes over time and yet remained steadfast and upright. In Luke 22:28-29, Christ says, "Because you have endured with me in the time of temptation, I appoint unto you a Kingdom."

Again...

It is an honourable thing to be old in the ways of righteousness because such individuals have much acquaintance with God; they become God's long-standing acquaintances. Now, we take great delight when we meet someone who is an old acquaintance. We say, "Oh! Such a one is my old acquaintance; he was my father's acquaintance, and therefore we prize him now."

An elderly person who has been godly for a long time is an old acquaintance of God our Father, and thus we honour him. In Exodus 15:23, where Moses praises God, he says, "He is our God, and our fathers' God." Is it an honour to God that He was the God of our fathers? Then it is an honour to you that you are a godly person, as our fathers were. If God is honoured for being our fathers' God, then you are honoured for being one of our fathers' saints, God's saint who is our father.

We read of Moses that, after spending only forty days conversing with God upon the mount, his face shone. If conversing with God for forty days made his face shine, what will it be like to converse with God for forty years? Oh! How their faces must shine, being so long acquainted with Him.

8. Those who continue to be gracious and godly in old age have done a great deal of service and are therefore honourable, especially if they have served in public roles. A public minister who has grown old in service to God is an object of great honour, worthy of deep reverence. I recall it is reported of Basil that, when officers came to apprehend him, he was engaged in holy duties, and the gravity and evident holiness of his countenance caused the officers to fall backwards; they were not able to bear it.

A man who has lived long in the service of God is very honourable before the Lord and men. We honour our old servants; if someone has been your family's servant for many years, you will not allow them to go without. You might say, "He was my father's servant before me, an ancient servant to the family, and therefore should not be disrespected." If we respect ancient servants to our families and companies, how much more should we respect an ancient servant of the Lord? How many glory in saying they have served the King for so long? Oh! It is truly worthy of glory if you have been in the service of the Lord for so long.

9. Oh! It is a crown of glory to be old in the ways of righteousness because you are near to that eternal crown. Romans 13:11 says, "Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." You are almost at heaven's door, and when you are seen in this light, you are to be honoured. An old soldier who, by virtue of long service, is next in line for promotion is looked upon with respect and regard. Perhaps the next place in heaven is likely to be your portion, for you are near your glory. Young people still have their warfare here, but your warfare is almost accomplished. As Isaiah 40 says, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, for their warfare is accomplished." Such individuals are to be honoured,

for it is a glory for a man to be near the Kingdom of Heaven, to be close to this crown of eternal glory.

10. If you continue in the ways of righteousness in your old age, then your crown of glory shall be exceedingly great and glorious. The longer you wait for it, the more glorious it shall be; the longer your crown is being crafted, the more it will be adorned with diamonds and pearls when it arrives. I have read of an emperor's son, who, when someone spoke to him about the glory he was to have in the future, said, "Yes, the cooks are taking a long time to prepare the dinner, but we shall have the better feast when it comes."

So, though God has allowed those who are aged and godly to live here in their pilgrimage for a long time, when their time comes, they shall have the greater glory. Put all these points together, and it is clear that the hoary head must indeed have a crown of glory if it is found in the way of righteousness.

USE 1.

We have cause to lament that we have so few objects of honour among us. Indeed, it is a most glorious sight to see an old, gracious, holy man who has been godly and righteous from his youth. It is truly a sight that draws the eyes of all to behold it. I remember Josephus says that, even as a child, Moses had such beauty that all who passed by were enamoured with him and could not help but stop and gaze at him. Truly, if there is a beautiful and honourable object in the world, it is to see a hoary head in the ways of righteousness. But, oh! Woe to us that we have so few of them among us. Blessed be God that there are some, but how happy we would be if we had more such examples to honour. That there are so few, I give you these evidences:

1. How few elderly people do we have who, when they come together, delight in sharing the experiences of God's ways, the passages of God's providence, the faithfulness of God, and His goodness to them and His people, giving glory to His name? Instead, when they meet, they tell many old tales or fables, delighting in recounting the tricks of their youth—what they did in such an inn, such a tavern, or in such company. They revive their youthful sins, but where do you find them discussing the providence and ways of God in their past to glorify Him?

2. How few elderly ones do we have who are fit to instruct the younger generation, to encourage them in the ways of righteousness, and to share what they have experienced in God's ways, thereby spurring them on to righteousness?

3. How few elderly ones do we find who delight in seeing God manifesting His glory even more in His ways, His truth, and His ordinances than He did before? Instead, are not many vexed and dismissive, thinking everything is merely new and wishing things remained as they were in the past?

4. How many do we have among the elderly who can say with Paul, "Now I have finished my course, I have fought the good fight of faith, and henceforth is laid up for me a crown of glory; Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly"? Certainly, if old age is found in the way of sin, it is as dishonourable as it is glorious when found in the ways of righteousness. Isaiah 65:20 says, "A sinner who is a hundred years old shall be accursed," says the Lord.

We read in Ezekiel 8:12 that when God wanted to expose the superstitious idolatry of His people, He showed Ezekiel what the elders of Israel were doing. Oh! It is a grave and heavy thing when the elders of Israel condone or engage in ways of superstition and

idolatry. And in Ezekiel 9:6, when God was bringing judgment upon His people, He commanded the destroying angel to begin with the elderly first. It is indeed a blessed thing when the hoary head is found in the ways of righteousness, but when white hairs cover a black conscience, it is a grievous thing.

Instead of being old in the ways of righteousness, some are old in adulteries, as in Ezekiel 23:43, where it says, "She was old in adultery." This was an aggravation of her sin—that she was old in it. To continue in the wantonness of youth into old age, or for old age to be a repository for the diseases of youth—these are serious offences. Those who are old in sin shall find old wrath heaped up for them. In Ezekiel 25:15, wrath is described as "old wrath," meaning it has accumulated over time. An old enemy of God is a dreadful thing, for such a one has been an enemy all his life and, perhaps, following in the footsteps of forefathers who were also enemies of God.

An old enemy of God is a most dreadful thing, for such a one, along with his forefathers, to have been long-standing adversaries to God. To be an old, earthly "muckworm," to be aged yet still ignorant and superstitious, and to serve as an example that leads others into evil merely because of the supposed respectability of their age—this is a grievous and deeply troubling matter. May the Lord speak to the hearts of those in such a condition, for they have so little time left to prepare their souls and make peace with God, and it is indeed a difficult task to accomplish.

As we read about the children of Israel, who were in captivity for seventy years, so there are many men and women who have been in captivity under Satan for seventy, perhaps even eighty years. Oh! How hard it is to work upon them. It is like trying to light a candle that has been left in the wet for a long time—it is difficult to ignite. In

the same way, it is hard to work the work of grace upon anyone who has been soaking in their corruptions for such an extended period. I will not say it is impossible, but show me an example of an aged person who has been converted late in life. Only one seems to stand out with any likelihood, and that is Manasseh; but aside from him, I know no other example.

I do not mean to say it is impossible, but I speak in this manner to stir up those who have not yet made peace with God, even though they have one foot in the grave. It is possible, but we must regard it as a mighty and significant act. God must magnify His free grace towards you, for how shall God accomplish His purpose in working upon you? What service can God expect from you when you have already given away your prime years to the ways of sin?

May the Lord speak to your consciences and humble you before Him this day, for your condition is indeed sad, and it is a most dreadful sight. Just as it is a most glorious sight to behold one who is righteous in their old age, so it is a most dreadful sight to see an old drunkard, an old swearer, or an old profane man. It is truly a fearful and terrible object to behold. However, we hope that the Lord has some among us who are worthy of much reverence and respect, and it is to them that I would prefer to speak.

USE 2

By way of encouragement and exhortation, much peace and comfort are due to such individuals. The Lord and the saints regard them as honourable. You are a Father in Israel, and God remembers all that you have done for Him over these forty, sixty years. I recall Luther saying that one gracious action is more excellent than heaven and earth, *Millies quam caelum et terra* (he said), meaning one gracious action; and there is truth in this. There is no gracious action that

doesn't possess more excellence than the very structure of heaven and earth.

Therefore, those who have remained steadfast in God's ways and have grown old in them—oh, how excellent are they, having performed so many gracious actions, all of which are treasured up with the Lord. Know that the Lord has old mercies for you, who have been an old disciple, and He will not forsake you in your old age. As Psalm 71:9 states, "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth." And in verse 18, "Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not."

If your conscience tells you that you have endeavoured to serve God from your youth and to do good in the place God has set you, you may now approach God with comfort. "O Lord! Now forsake me not when I am old; leave me not when I am aged." Now, you have the blessings of God's people upon you, and whenever you depart from this world, oh, the sweet fragrance you will leave behind! You are a glory and honour to all your children and will continue to be so after you are dead and gone.

In Proverbs 17:6, it says, "Children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children are their fathers." The glory of children indeed lies in their fathers when they are gracious and godly. And now, what an honour it is for a child to have descended from such a person! "Oh! This young man had a very gracious father, an ancient, respectable citizen who acted worthily in his time, serving God greatly. He was a man of excellent gifts in the place where God had set him." Surely, there is a blessing for the child who had such a father. Why? Because the very mention of you in your old age is an honour to your child after you.

Therefore, seeing that God has placed a crown upon you, strive to brighten this crown more and more, making it more glorious before you die. That is my task now (and then I shall conclude): to show you what old men should do to make their crown more glorious, how they should exercise righteousness so as to be truly glorious both in life, in death, and eternally thereafter.

1. Bewail the sins of your youth; that is a most suitable work for old men, where their righteousness should flow. Mourn over the sins of your youth, and bless God that you have time to lament them. Thus David, in Psalm 25:7, prays, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions." Oh, the many evils of my youth that have passed! How blessed I would have been had I begun sooner in the ways of God! It was Augustine's grievous complaint, *Domine nimis Sera amavi te* ("O Lord, I have loved you too late"), when he was an old man. So, all of you who are old and ancient, reflect on your past—did you begin to grow in grace when you were young? If you must say, "O Lord, I began to love you too late," then it would have been a great blessing had you begun sooner.

2. Strive to redeem the time, to do much for God while He continues to give you time. You have but a little time left to live, so let much be done in that time. Even the best of you have neglected the early part of your lives; now double your diligence in the latter part. Strive to redeem the time by encouraging others in the ways of godliness, that they may be more fervent than you, leaving a succession of godliness after you are dead and gone. Ask yourselves, "Shall I leave this world having done so little for God? How little and poor the service I have rendered unto God all my days." Again, consider what you may yet do for His glory.

3. Encourage those who are young and who will follow after you. As David said, "Come, children, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Tell them what you have experienced in the ways of God, how sweet and good they have been to you. Labour with your servants and children so that, when you pass away, you may do so with greater comfort. Take care not to criticise the younger ones in their zeal for the ways of God. Do not seize upon any small offence they might commit and say, "Aha, this is your religion, this is your zeal, this is your profession." Oh! If you were truly gracious yourselves, you would be cautious about rebuking them in matters of faith.

It is true that if any of your servants or children profess religion more than others yet are negligent in their duties, they should be rebuked all the more sharply. But you must do it with gravity, tenderness of affection, and with a sense of how God's name suffers. This would befit you, to speak to them as if in God's name, charging matters solemnly upon their consciences and sanctifying them through prayer. However, to criticise them for every expression of their fervour in religion, surely this is wrong. If they were to bring their grievances before God, claiming that they try their best to please you but you take advantage of their earnestness in religion, oh! This would be heard against you in heaven.

4. You who are older, strive to enhance the crown of your glory. Bless God that you live to see any manifestation of His name beyond what you have seen before. That you live to see this day, Christ appearing for His people, His children, and His ordinances more than in times past—whatever you may think of it. Certainly, if many of your forefathers could come back to life and witness these times, they would fall on their faces to the ground in thanksgiving for what you have lived to see. I dare say, there is no godly elder living today in

England who does not find cause for abundant praise to God that they have lived to witness such a revelation of God's work.

Do not be vexed or frustrated because of some troubles and interruptions. In Zechariah 3, at the end, when the foundation of the Temple was laid, the old men wept and cried. The young men shouted and praised God, but the old men wept because they remembered what had been before. In a similar way, many young men today shout and bless God for what they witness, but many older men weep because it is not as it once was. They can recall much more peace in Queen Elizabeth's days; now, they see so much distraction and dissension. Therefore, they are prone to weep when the foundation of the Temple, the work of reformation, is laid.

Oh! They are ready to weep because of the current turmoil, but when you consider everything together, certainly no one since England became a nation, no, nor since the beginning of the world, has seen more of God and His gracious ways with a people than you have seen. Therefore, do not be irritable about what is lacking, but give God the praise and glory for what has been well begun.

5. Show your righteousness by being willing to open your hearts to embrace whatever truths God may further reveal to you. Do not say, "What new things will we have now? Shall we be wiser than our forefathers?" Be cautious of using such arguments about your ancestors. You know that passage in 1 Peter 1:18, where Christ is said to have laid down His life to redeem us from our vain ways, received by tradition from our fathers. Therefore, do not cling too much to old customs or what existed in your forefathers' time, but if God reveals any further truth, be ready to embrace it and bless His name for it, for there are truths that arise in different generations.

If your forefathers, during times of reformation, had said (as many of them did), "Shall we be wiser than our forefathers?" we would still be in popery. And yet, we think it was good that they before us departed from their ancestors' ways. Therefore, we must pay attention to the truths that emerge, those manifested in different generations. It is not that any truth is entirely new, but the manifestation of some truths is more evident in certain generations than in others. Hence, in 1 Peter 1:12, the Apostle speaks of being established in the "present truth."

In Luther's time, the doctrine of justification was the present truth of that age, and so, in these times, there are present truths being made known, both concerning our outward and spiritual liberties. There was much false teaching before, even concerning your estates—that you owned nothing, but that all was at the absolute will of those above you, that you had no property rights at all. Regarding spiritual liberty, we know the bondage we were once in. Therefore, strive now to understand these truths and give God the glory for them before you embrace these present truths. It is strange that people should be so fixated on former things as to neglect the grace of God for the present, simply because of what came before.

Now, as for the Fathers (as we call them Fathers), though they are to be revered for their grace, they lived among heathens and had just emerged from heathenism. They were forced to yield as much as they could to the heathens around them, which led to many corruptions. Likewise, the first reformers, having come out of popery, yielded as far as they could to gain others. Therefore, we must not make what happened before the rule of things but instead bless God for what is revealed now.

6. Another way for older men to beautify their crown in righteousness is this: you who are advanced in years should often reflect on eternity. You are now on the verge of launching into the ocean of eternity, and in a few years, there will be a mighty difference between your present condition and what it will be when you enter your eternal state. Think much about eternity, all you who are older. Although young people should have their thoughts weighed down with eternity, nothing will better temper the thoughts of both the old and the young than to have them balanced with considerations of eternity—especially those of you who are advanced in years.

7. Beware of those things that are common weaknesses associated with old age, such as timorousness. Oh! You wish to die in peace; you have lived in peace all this time and are reluctant to suffer anything for the truth. Polycarp was not like this—when he was eighty-six years old, he remained courageous. So, strive to have the courage of young men for God, even in your old age.

Guard against a surly and irritable spirit that resists new things simply because you have not received them before. Remember the account of the Roman Senate: when Tiberius wanted Christ to be honoured as a god, they refused. Why? Because the Senate had not proposed it first. In your meetings, even when many are convinced of a good thing, they may oppose it simply because it wasn't first suggested by the elders, but by the young ones. Therefore, even if it is excellent, they will stubbornly cling to their old ways. Oh! Beware of such surliness and irritability of spirit.

Remember the Greeks: it was said that when they wished a curse upon their enemies, they would wish that their enemies would be pleased with bad customs. Indeed, it is a grievous curse when old

men are so set in their ways that they refuse to depart from what they have done in the past.

And then, again, another way to honour your crown in the ways of righteousness is…

8. When God takes you out of this world (as before long He surely must), labour to prepare yourselves so that you may die in faith, in the hope of the glorious things that God is working for the Church in this latter age. Certainly, God is doing great things for His Church in this latter age of the world, greater things than have ever been done before, and those who are still alive may live to see more glorious workings of God in the world than ever before. Though you may not live to see the great things that God intends to do, you can still glorify God before you die by dying in faith, as old Jacob did.

It is a notable expression of old Jacob when he lay dying; he called his sons to him and said, in Genesis 48:21, "And Israel said to Joseph, 'Behold, I die, but God shall be with you and bring you again to the land of your fathers.'" So, when you who are old lie upon your deathbeds and younger ones gather around you, say to them, "Behold, I die, but rest assured, God will be faithful in His promises to the Church. There are glorious things being done for His people." In Hebrews 11:22, the faith of Joseph is commended, in that when he died, he gave orders concerning his bones. Why? What act of faith was it for him to give instructions for his bones to be carried out of Egypt? Yes, it was an act of faith that he believed God would fulfil His promises. You should die believing that God will fulfil those blessed promises He has made to the Churches.

9. Take heed now in your old age against a worldly spirit. This is a charge often laid against older men, and yet it is one of the most strange and unreasonable things that can be. It is very noticeable

that God has promised length of days to those with quite the opposite attitude. However, we see that this heart condition prevails exceedingly among older men. In Proverbs 28:16, it says, "But he who hates covetousness shall prolong his days," yet we find that older men are most prone to it, even though the scripture promises length of days by hating covetousness. There are none among you who wouldn't desire to live a year longer, so now especially hate covetousness in these times.

Nothing will dishonour your crown more than the sin of covetousness in these days, because if ever there were times when God called for spiritual and heavenly hearts, it is now. In Revelation 4, we read a description of the various ages of the Church: one was like a lion, the second a calf, the third a man, and the fourth an eagle. The last state of reformation of the Church should be like an eagle, meaning that the hearts of those living in that state should be eagle-like, soaring aloft in heavenly and spiritual things, as it befits those who are old. Do not now be meanly sparing and stingy, for God has great works to do for His people.

I have read of a people in India who worshipped the tooth of a beast, and when it was taken from them, they offered an incredible amount of treasure to recover it because they placed their religion in it. If these heathens were willing to disburse an incredible amount of treasure to regain that religious relic of a beast's tooth, how much more willing should you be to freely lay out your estates for the reformation of religion and for ensuring that the truths and ordinances of God are free among us?

We know that both the state and the necessity of our brethren call for generous hearts, and you, who wear the crown of glory in regard to age, ought to lead the way for others. Be willing to give freely for

their sake. Remember, it is said of the Romans, to their honour, that at the very time when Hannibal was in the field, they would be purchasing fields where their enemy was and would pay a substantial sum for them. Do not be so distrustful, but be willing to disburse in ways that might be beneficial for the relief of our brethren in Ireland and for the establishment of the gospel there, even though there may be some hazards at present.

Ordinarily, those who are old are often full of fears and distrust, but of all people, they should be the freest from them. And in the last place:

10. Let your prayers and your embracing of the gospel in the present be such that you may have hope when you die, that you will leave the gospel as an inheritance to your children afterwards. With what comfort can an aged man or woman die unless they have the hope that the gospel will be left to their children?

Not many years ago, when elderly people died who had any insight into the ways of God, they died with trembling hearts, thinking, "Now I am going, and what miseries might my child experience? I do not know; perhaps they may be brought up in popery and idolatry." But now, when you die, you may have the hope of leaving the gospel as an inheritance to your children, especially if your prayers are fervent and your embrace of it is as it ought to be.

It is said of Justin the Younger that he went mad with the fear that the Roman Empire would decay in his time; he was extremely troubled by such a thought. In the same way, each generation should be concerned, asking, "What! Should the gospel decay, and its legacy be cut off in my time?" This should trouble each one of us deeply. Therefore, be encouraged, and let there be a youthful vigour in your

spirits to strive to propagate the gospel so that you may hope to leave it to your posterity after you are gone.

And it will not be long that you shall have it, for consider this: you have been given a blessed talent of grace in the time God has granted you. I dare say that there has never been a period of eighty years since the world began that has been as blessed for the revelation of the mystery of godliness as these past eighty years. Those who have lived through them have experienced such a remarkable span of time. Pick out any other eighty years since the beginning of the world, and no nation has had such an eighty years as this nation has had. Therefore, know that you have much to answer for.

Remember this: if you have any godliness at all, you have made many covenants and vows to God during your lifetime. Fulfil them before you die; do not die in God's debt. You have offered many prayers, and each prayer is an obligation to you in the ways of godliness. If you thus beautify your crown, when the time comes for you to die, oh, how sweet death will be for you! Your pillow will be soft when you come to die if you can say (according to your measure), as Christ did in John 17, "Father, glorify me with Thyself; I have finished the work Thou hast given me to do."

Reflect upon this, you who are advanced in years: if you were to die, are you able to say as Christ did? For in your own measure, though not as perfectly as Christ did, you may say, "Father, glorify me with Thyself; I have finished the work Thou hast given me to do. Thou knowest that it has been my concern throughout the days of my humble pilgrimage to finish this great work Thou gavest me to do in this world." Oh, how sweet death will be for one who dies in such a way!

USE 3

One word to you who are young (and so I will conclude): Is it such a crown of glory to be found old in the ways of righteousness? Then begin to be godly early, so that if you live long in this world, you may have this crown set upon your heads when you are aged. For is it not better for you to be plants in God's house than weeds upon the dunghill?

Those who are wicked are but as weeds upon a dunghill, but you who are godly are as plants in God's own orchard. In the last chapter of Romans, we find that Andronicus and Junia are commended because they were in Christ before Saint Paul: "They were in Christ before me." It is an honourable thing to be in Christ before others. This is truly honourable when you are young, and then to continue in the ways of godliness throughout your youth, into your middle age, and until you become old.

Here in my text, you have this crown prepared for you, for so says the Holy Spirit: "The hoary head is a crown of glory if it be found in the way of righteousness."

FINIS

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ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions September 2024. Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn Or 97068